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Announcements:

Call for Article Submissions for the JLS:

The study of Laos and the Lao has grown significantly over the past decade. With the opening up of some historical and manuscript archives, the improvement of communication and transportation, and the launching of joint Lao-foreign research projects, Laos has attracted a number of new scholars in diverse fields of expertise. The *Journal of Lao Studies* (JLS) is an exciting new scholarly project which is expected to become the first and most prestigious venue for researchers who work on Laos.

We are now accepting submissions of articles, book review suggestions, review articles (extended reviews of major publications, trends in the field, or of political, social, or economic events). These submissions can cover studies on Laos, the Lao diaspora (Northeast Thailand, Europe, the Americas, Australia, and so on), or studies in regards to ethnic groups found in Laos (Hmong, Akha, Khmu, among others).

Language: Lao and English are the main languages, other languages are welcomed. Please check with the editors first before submitting articles in other languages not listed here.

Introducing a Second Collection of Papers from the Fourth International Conference on Lao Studies (4ICLS)

By Guest Editors: Ian G. Baird¹ and Christine Elliott²

The Fourth International Conference of Lao Studies (4ICLS) was held at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison) in Madison, Wisconsin, in the United States, from April 19–21, 2013. The conference was organized by the Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the Center for Lao Studies (CLS), based in San Francisco, California.

4ICLS brought together over 250 scholars, students and community members from around the world with various interests related to Lao studies. During the conference, a total of 38 panels and 120 individual presentations addressed a wide range of topics.

As with past international Lao studies conferences, 4ICLS defined “Lao studies” broadly so as to include not only scholarly research related to ethnic Lao people, but also peoples from all ethnic groups found in Laos, including but not limited to the Hmong, Iu-Mien, Khmu, Lue, Lamet, Tai Dam, Brao, Akha, Jrou and Brou. The government of Laos presently recognizes 49 major ethnic groups and over 160 subgroups (Lao Front for National Construction 2005). In addition to these groups, the conference covered ethnic Lao peoples (and speakers of other Tai languages) living in other countries in Asia such as Thailand, Cambodia, Viet Nam and China. Research presentations related to people from all the ethnic groups found in Laos but who live in other parts of the world, including former refugees and their descendants and other immigrants to North America, Europe and Oceania, as well as those with roots in Laos but who now identify as Lao Americans, Hmong Americans or simply Asian Americans, also contributed to the conference.

This is the second special issue of the *Journal of Lao Studies* (JLS) that includes papers presented at 4ICLS. The first issue, which came out in March 2015, included a short introduction, much like this one, and eight full-length research articles focusing on a wide range of topics. This issue contains this introduction and seven additional full-length research papers, all of which passed through a rigorous double-blind peer-review process (two or three reviewers per paper). We are grateful for the helpful feedback provided by the many prominent scholars who agreed to serve as referees. Their comments were crucial for ensuring the quality of the final published papers. We also thank Rebecca May for her expert support in copyediting the papers.

This special issue explores two important but considerably different areas within Lao studies: upland peoples and Tai linguistics. The first group includes four papers

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related to upland peoples from Laos, all of which rely on ethnography as their primary method of study. The first paper in this group discusses the people from the Kim Mun ethnic group in northern Laos, the second considers upland ethnic minorities in Xekong Province in southern Laos, the third examines people from the Phounoy ethnic group in the far north, and the fourth relates to Lao Hmong people living at the Wat Tham Krabok Buddhist temple in Saraburi, central Thailand.

The second focus of this special issue is Tai linguistics, particularly Lao language varieties and other related Tai dialects. There are three articles in this group. The first deals with the history of “r” in the spoken and written Lao language. The second discusses the relationship between the language of “Lao Khrang” people in central and northern Thailand—people who were originally from the Luang Phrabang area in Laos—and the variety of Lao currently spoken in Luang Phrabang today. The third relates to the language of ethnic Phuan/Phouan people living in northern Cambodia.

The first paper, written by Jacob Cawthorne, a PhD candidate in the Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne in Australia, examines the ritual life of ethnic Kim Mun people in northern Laos. The Kim Mun, also known as the Lanten, Man or Lao Houay, are a particularly small ethnic group in Laos, one with a language in the Hmong-Mien family and closely related to Iu Mien. This article represents a particularly important contribution to the literature. As one of the article’s referees pointed out, there has been very little recorded about the Kim Mun, and virtually nothing has been written about their ritual life. The paper also indicates that for academics working on Taoism, there is research to be done in Laos, something that is not always recognized by either Lao or religious studies scholars.

The second paper was authored by Dr. Yves Goudineau, who has recently taken up the prestigious position of director at the École Française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) in Paris, France. He was previously the head of the EFEO in Chiang Mai, Thailand and Vientiane, Laos. His paper, which examines the politics of ethnic categorization in the particular context of Xekong Province in southeastern Laos, is based on his keynote address at 4ICLS. The paper makes an important contribution to understanding the politics of multi-ethnicity in contemporary Laos in a time of rapid social change and with the assimilation of minorities into the ethnic Lao mainstream. Crucially, it illuminates the ironies associated with the Lao PDR government’s official discourse regarding multicultural heritage preservation.

The third paper is written by Vanina Bouté, an associate professor at the Université de Picardie in Amiens, France, who is also affiliated with the Centre Asie du Sud-Est (l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales [EHESS]). Based on extensive interviews as well as an analysis of primary source documents, her paper examines the formation of what came to be considered the “Phounoy” ethnic group in northern Laos’ Phongsaly Province and their relations with lowland society, thus engaging with debates surrounding “Zomia” and particularly the engaging but controversial book, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*, by James C. Scott (2009). Bouté argues that the example of the Phounoy shows how this group, over time, developed symbiotic relationships with the Lao majority, illustrating instances of integration, not solely resistance, in response to the development of the Tai Muang in the region. In this sense, it adds to a growing body of new research demonstrating that upland and lowland societies in mainland Southeast Asia have generally benefited much

more from interactions with each other than Scott suggests (see, for example, Jonsson 2010; 2012; Baird 2013; Lee 2015).

The fourth paper that addresses upland peoples is written by David Chambers, a PhD candidate in geography at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and deals with the relationship between ethnic Hmong people originally from Laos and the Wat Tham Krabok temple, an unusual Theravada Buddhist temple in Saraburi Province, central Laos. As a geographer, Chambers is particularly interested in spatiality, and as with Bouté's paper, he is also interested in engaging with Scott's ideas about "Zomia" (Scott 2009). His contribution is unique, however, in that Chambers specifically uses the concept of anarchism to examine the Hmong who lived at Tham Krabok during the 1990s and early 2000s until the period during which over 15,000 Hmong were allowed to immigrate to the United States in 2004–2005, and the unofficial Hmong refugee camp was closed down. As one of the reviewers, a prominent scholar of Hmong Studies, wrote when assessing the value of the paper, "The ethnographic detail is rich and interesting and useful in a historical and theoretical sense."

Although the first four papers deal with upland ethnic minorities, the other three papers are concerned with Tai linguistics, particularly Lao language varieties within Laos and related Tai dialects used outside of Laos, in neighboring Thailand and Cambodia. These three papers not only add to our knowledge of Tai linguistics but also show the historical connections and cross-linguistic influences among Tai language groups, which are spread throughout mainland Southeast Asia but centered mostly in present-day Laos and Thailand.

The first of these papers, and the fifth paper in the special issue, is written by Garry Davis, a professor of linguistics at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Davis examines the historical development of the Lao language pertaining to the letter "r," an often controversial letter in Lao, one that was stricken from the written language after the Pathet Lao gained control of Laos in 1975, but which has now been reinstated, and is once again being used more widely within Laos (Chamberlain 2009). Although controversy has surrounded use of "r" in written form in modern times, as Davis explains, "...the [r]-sound is, and has been, exceedingly rare in the Lao language for decades if not for centuries." Davis' paper builds on work by Enfield (1999) and traces linguistic evidence beginning with Lao inscriptions to show how the use of the Lao "r" changed over time in relation to "h" and "l" in both speaking and writing, and how its development has also been affected by cultural and religious traditions and cross-linguistic influences that include borrowings from Pali-Sanskrit, Khmer and Thai. As the title of Davis' paper suggests, it fills gaps in our knowledge of how these changes may have taken place and shows how comparisons of Tai languages such as Lao and Thai can further our understanding of their linguistic development.

The second paper related to linguistics, and the sixth paper in the issue, is written by Varisa Osatananda, an associate professor of linguistics at Thammasat University in Bangkok, Thailand. She examines the language of the ethnic "Lao Khrang" people, a Tai dialect spoken by a small ethnic group found in central and northern Thailand, but originating in the Luang Phrabang area of northern Laos. Osatananda is not only interested in comparing the tonal systems of these two Tai varieties (Lao Khrang and Lao spoken in Luang Phrabang) to determine their similarity (linguistic proximity), but is also interested in how Lao Khrang is perceived by speakers of Luang Phrabang Lao in terms

of native versus non-native accent (perceptual proximity). Osatananda's paper adds to a small but growing body of work examining linguistic data gathered within Laos and contributes to existing research that analyzes connections among various Tai language groups in mainland Southeast Asia. Such work is particularly urgent because regional dialects such as Lao Khrang are much less commonly spoken today by the younger generation.

The third paper related to linguistics, and the seventh and final paper in the collection, is written by Thananan Trongdee, an assistant professor at Mahasarakham University in Mahasarakham Province, northeastern Thailand. Trongdee analyzes the language of the ethnic Phuan/Phouan people living in northern Cambodia, a previously unstudied linguistic group in Cambodia. As with the Lao Khrang paper, this study examines a Tai ethnic group, the Phuan/Phouan, who were forcibly moved in the 18th and 19th centuries from what is now Laos and resettled into an area that was at the time under the control of Siam. Using both linguistic data and historical records, Trongdee builds the case that some of the so-called '*Liao*' (or "Lao" in the Khmer language) in northwestern Cambodia are actually Phuan/Phouan who were first forced to move to Siam from their home in Xieng Khouang, in Laos, and then later sent as laborers by the Siamese government to Battambang in Cambodia, which was under Siamese control at the time. In addition to contributing an original linguistic data analysis concerning a Tai dialect spoken in Cambodia, this paper is, as one reviewer pointed out, "a significant contribution to our knowledge of the [Phuan/]Phouan depopulation by the Thai military in the 19th century and of the extent of the dispersal in its wake," and is a good example of the how the fields of history and linguistics can be mutually supportive.

Ultimately, the seven papers included in this special issue, along with the eight included in the first special issue that emerged out of 4ICLS, constitute a considerable amount of new peer-reviewed and now published knowledge related to Lao studies, broadly defined. We hope readers find the papers of interest.

We are now looking forward to the Fifth International Lao Studies Conference (5ICLS), which will be hosted by Thammasat University in July 2016.

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Social Cohesion under the Aegis of Reciprocity: Ritual Activity and Household Interdependence among the Kim Mun (Lanten-Yao) in Laos.

Jacob Cawthorne¹

Abstract

This paper investigates the interdependence between ethnic Kim Mun households that is necessitated by ritual activity. Kim Mun ritual activity is underscored by a religious contract formed between a Kim Mun household and the celestial bureaucracy, a relationship that has significant bearing on social cohesion in Kim Mun villages. The paper argues that, due to the precepts of their religion, when a household performs a ritual, it requires the assistance of other households and as a result incurs obligations to those households—an interdependence born from reciprocity. Furthermore, the system punishes those who do not fulfill their obligations, not only in the religious sense but also in the social sense. As Laos continues its economic modernization, this system is coming under strain from new external forces. The consequences of these forces vary across different levels of social formation—be it the household, village or ethnic community—with divergent implications for Kim Mun ritual activity, community and ethnic identity.

A Letter to Our Kin

In early 2012, I was shown a manuscript by a Kim Mun ritual practitioner as we sat resting in his home in Namdy Village, Luang Namtha District. The manuscript was a copy of a *kjen* (信 story, narrative) that was sent to Kim Mun villages in Lai Châu, Vietnam, in 2004.² There are many kinds of *kjen*; some tell histories or apocryphal tales while others are narratives about love, family or personal events. The author of this *kjen* composed it with the purpose of describing his village to Kim Mun in Vietnam and eliciting a reply in kind. It included information about rituals, marriage and funeral ceremonies, clans and kinship, demography, the environment, and societal issues pertaining to his village and the broader Kim Mun community in Laos—the same information I had been documenting in my fieldwork. I begin this paper with a selection of paragraphs taken from this *kjen*, which offer a perspective on how the Kim Mun view their own culture, and reveal information that they deem important to understanding Kim Mun society.³

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² My transcriptions of Kim Mun words (both vernacular and literary) are provided as a rough guide. They are based on the IPA, but I have not included tone marks. There has been little research conducted on the Kim Mun literary and vernacular languages in Laos, and, as Strecker (1990) shows for the vernacular language, the tone systems are both complex.

³ I have reproduced each excerpt to follow the original manuscript as closely as possible. Both simplified and traditional Chinese characters are used, as are variant characters that are found in Chinese variant character

.....

We live in the provinces of Luang Namtha, Oudomxay and Bokeo.

安在南塔猛紂總 庀校省里有云親

There are thirty villages with four thousand people, young and old.

每寨再來有三十 大小有齊四千們

We have people of the Pan, Tang, Li, Wong, Kiang and Dang clans.

盤鄧李黃蔣騰姓 齊在老國少本根

.....

In your villages which clans do you have, and are they the same as ours?

知之親山有己姓 洞姓能愁有己枝

.....

We perform the tɛŋ-θiu and θam-tæu rituals; they are performed in any house suffering misfortune.

清醮三朝恩修似 何家有冤苦解分

The tu-pu, kɔŋ-woŋ and hɔŋ-lau rituals are performed to address illnesses, but if no one is sick then they are performed every three years for the spirits of the mother and father.

土府貢王紅樓會 三年敬奉武公婆

Families with enough money can perform ai-ma:n rituals, but those who are poor can only do small na:m-ma:n rituals.

何家有钱淨得似 何家無錢空喃分

We perform our rituals how we think we should; but we don't know if we're right as there are no elders to teach us.

空亂淨得成形相 行教不齊親口親

.....

Families that have money will arrange for their son(s) to undertake the initiation rite of both the θai-kɔŋ and tɔu-kɔŋ traditions.

何家富財有钱使 便是三元三清經

Families without means will only arrange for the rite of the θai-kɔŋ tradition.

何家貧難無錢使 空受三元一教分

dictionaries. Where it is not possible to reproduce a graph I have indicated it with a “□.” I was first given an exegesis of the *kjen* in the Lao language by the owner of the manuscript, which is presented here translated into English based on the principles of a communicative translation (Newmark 1988). The Lao language exegesis was not given to me as a direct translation but as a loose interpretation of the *kjen*—meaning being the principal objective. I have not provided a direct translation from the manuscript as there is insufficient space for details of the translation method and procedures; the *kjen* includes graphs with meanings that do not align with their Chinese equivalents: for example: 安 “to reside,” 齊 “everyone together” and 蚁 “my.” The purpose of reproducing the following excerpts in this way is to present the themes, questions and ideas of the author via the English translation of the Lao language exegesis, and attempt to show the excerpts in their original form.

In the past we studied our rituals and texts, but now after youths undertake the initiation rite they learn nothing.

前世應孝前法書 授戒已男為修陰

These days, youths do not study our rituals or texts, they only study Lao ways.

今世不孝旧法書 空孝提民新里行

They only think of studying the Lao language, and getting a job in an office with a salary.

空孝民新里理上 座在朝廷吃官糧

.....

Our elders have passed away, and the youth are abandoning our traditions; so we will lose all our knowledge.

老枝良齊罷命了 必定旧法轰了完

Now when people are ill or suffering, they can only go to the doctor for medicine.

何海病口多受苦 空遛揚官玉藥齋

.....

A key theme linking these excerpts, and the *kjen* in general, is the author's perception that religion is central to Kim Mun culture and plays a critical role in the Kim Mun ethnic community in Laos.⁴ This resounds not only in his descriptions of ritual practices and their importance to the social vitality of his own community, but also in his attempt to acquire corresponding information from Kim Mun elsewhere. It is evident throughout the *kjen* that the author recognizes the changes transpiring in his community, but he appears less perturbed by the changes themselves and more with how they correlate with the loss of ritual knowledge. From my fieldwork experience, it is apparent many Kim Mun are aware that modernization and development are effecting change in their culture, community and identity, and their perceptions agree with and vary from that in the *kjen*. They are influenced as much by their own individual interests and needs as they are by the expectations of their household, village and community.

Recent research on highland ethnic groups in mainland Southeast Asia has explored the dynamics of ethnic identity by examining the interplay of exogenous forces, patterns and structures (e.g., the state and the market) with the endogenous agency of ethnic groups and local multiethnic populations (Michaud and Forsyth 2011; Robinne and Sadan 2007). Jonsson (2009; 2005) has produced two studies on the Lu Mien in Thailand and Laos that examine how external (historical and contemporary) settings

⁴ This *kjen* may be said to represent a form of auto-ethnography as well as being a record of the Kim Mun in Laos. It is illustrative of the highly literate nature of Kim Mun culture in both the religious and secular domains. Since arriving in northern Laos, this literacy has been maintained endogenously, i.e. within the ethnic community, and has operated without state or other external administration. Research on the Kim Mun has largely approached their religious system – in particular its textual aspect – as either an ancillary component subservient to a dominant oral culture, or as something that should be viewed through a Sinitic lens framed by Taoist studies. The results have either been a downplaying of the textual facets of Kim Mun ritual and in particular the literacy competence of ritual practitioners, or a tendency to present their ritual system as a deviant form of Taoist ritual.

have prompted varied socio-cultural formations and self-fashionings of ethnic identity among Lu Mien populations. Évrard (2007) and Petit (2013) write of similar processes among the Khmu in Luang Namtha Province. The Kim Mun in Laos have also undergone transformations wrought by external forces; their migrations to Laos, experiences of war, and citizenship in a (post-)socialist state are just some of the potential catalysts. This topic requires further investigation, but is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, I work on the belief that Kim Mun people themselves articulate a shared sense of ethnic community, which allows me to explore one aspect of Kim Mun social life, ritual activity, and attempt to understand its impact on their households, their villages and their community in Laos. The establishment of contracts between households and the celestial pantheon via ritual practice is a well-known aspect of Kim Mun religion, but how the continuation of these contracts shapes the social interrelationships between households is less understood. Consequently, this paper is less concerned with how the current interface between ritual activity and social relationships came to be and more with how it manifests itself *now*. I hope this paper can provide means for larger abstractions about ethnicity, religion and community in Laos, and between Kim Mun—and Yao, a broader ethnonym to which the Kim Mun are assigned—populations across national borders.

The Kim Mun (in Laos)

What do written sources on the Kim Mun tell us about the Kim Mun? The problems associated with conceptualizing ethnicity, and its ascribed traditions and beliefs, as a closed system are well known. Nonetheless, concepts of ethnicity and notions of ethnic identity remain relevant, particularly among minority groups. Research on the Yao has attributed political, social and economic causes to processes that delineated a people as ‘Yao’ and as an ethnic group; and similarly, the agency of Yao actors in relation to (historical) external forces and their effect on the cultural symbols and social patterns that (are used to) identify the group has also been explored. For example, Faure (2006) has proposed that in the Ming Dynasty, it was land and status boundaries marked by state and local interests that were instrumental in ‘making’ the Yao people. Litzinger (2000) has explored the discourses of Yao elites in the People’s Republic of China and their framing of a Yao history and identity that is related to, and ultimately compatible with, Chinese state ideology. Jonsson (2005) aims to counter the notion of the Lu Mien as a “self-explanatory” ethnic category, and instead focuses on how Lu Mien have aligned with and resisted external forces (such as the forces of war and the state), with consequences that instigated alternative social and cultural formations and self-fashionings of ethnic identity.

In linguistic terms, the Kim Mun constitute the second largest sub-group of the Mienic branch of the Hmong-Mien (Miao-Yao) linguistic family—‘little brother’ to the Lu Mien. At present, there are Kim Mun in northern Laos, northern Vietnam and in the provinces of Guangxi, Yunnan and Hainan in southern China.⁵ They are counted as a

⁵ The Kim Mun in Hainan are classified under the Miao group (苗族) despite having linguistic ties to the Mienic branch of the Hmong-Mien language family and similar cultural and religious practices. For descriptions of the Mien linguistic group, see: Ratliff (2010), Mao (2004); and Niederer (1998). For the Yao ethnic group, see: Li (2001); Pu and Guo (1992); and Mao, Meng and Deng (1982).

minority ethnic group in each state, usually grouped under the *Mien* or *Yao* ethnonym on the basis of shared language and culture.⁶ In Laos, they live in Luang Namtha, Oudomxay, Bokeo and Phongsaly provinces, and are popularly known by the exonyms *Lanten* and *Lao Houay*, but are officially grouped with the *Iu Mien* under the *Mien* ethnonym (Department of Ethnic Affairs 2008). *Lanten* is a derivative of the Chinese word for indigo (*landian* 藍靛), and use of the appellation likely arose due to the striking indigo color that the *Kim Mun* dye their clothing. *Lao Houay* (*Lao of the Stream*) reportedly emerged in *Lao parlance* due to the proclivity that the *Kim Mun* have for establishing villages alongside mountain streams. The endonym *kim mun* means ‘mountain people.’ In the second line of the *kjen* above, the term *mun* (們) is used in self-reference, as simply ‘people’; it appears often in *Kim Mun* literary texts.⁷ The term also dominates *Kim Mun* spoken vernacular; for example *mun-wa:* means the *Kim Mun* vernacular language and *mun-sa* and *mun-tɔn* mean an unmarried girl and boy respectively. Conversely, *iu* (瑶) is typically used by *Kim Mun* in specific reference to group (and nowadays ethnic) identity, often as *iu-nin* (瑶人).⁸ For example, a line from the *kjen* discussed above reads: 真是遥人有己姓 “How many *iu nin* clan-names are there [in *Lai Châu*]?” There is a semantic duality with this term, for while the *Kim Mun* use it, as in the example above, in reference to *Kim Mun* only, they also use the term to include *Iu Mien* and other *Yao* groups.⁹

Historical sources indicate that the *Kim Mun* (and *Yao* in general) originally inhabited a region in modern-day southern China, with some scholars locating their homeland in the south of Hunan Province (Xu 2001; Wu 1993). It was in this area that *Kim Mun* communities first came into contact with Taoism, and its ritual texts and liturgies were incorporated into their religious system (Zhang 2002: 67–70). At present, historical accounts of the *Kim Mun* (and *Iu Mien*) are tied to the *Yao* ethnonym and largely drawn on via Chinese historical texts, official documents and early 20th century anthropological surveys.¹⁰ As both antagonist and collaborator in China’s historical dealings with its southern regions, these documents report *Yao* rebellions against imperial tax and corvée demands and banditry in response to loss of land caused by Han-

⁶ The term *Mien* henceforth refers to both *Kim Mun* and *Iu Mien* groups. The term *Yao* is used when it appears in references to Chinese historical sources or contemporary works. Care must be taken when using both the *Mien* and *Yao* ethnonyms as the *Yao* group (瑶族) in China includes non-Mienic-speaking communities as well as people with disparate religious beliefs and practices. *Mun* and *Mien* both translate as “person” or “people” in these groups’ respective languages.

⁷ Where possible, I have given the graph(s) used by *Kim Mun* in Laos. However, for other cases the vernacular and literary terms differ or a graph is not represented in Unicode, and is therefore not given.

⁸ There are several variant graphs used for the term *iu* in both *Mien* and Chinese sources, including 瑶, 遥, 僛 and 猺 (Alberts 2007).

⁹ In Luang Namtha, the *Kim Mun* make distinctions within their own group, using terms such as highland *Kim Mun* (*kim kjaŋ mun*) and lowland *Kim Mun* (*kim ha mun*), or clan names, for example *kjaŋ mun* (people of the Kiang 蔣 clan) who are known for their good looks and propensity to prattle. The Namtha *Kim Mun* call themselves lowland *Kim Mun* and the *Kim Mun* in Phongsaly Province highland *Kim Mun*. Many *Kim Mun* use the terms *phao iu* and *phao lanten* when discussing ethnic identity in the Lao language, but deem *Lao Houay* to be pejorative. Nonetheless, *mun* is the *locus classicus* of self-reference in everyday discourse.

¹⁰ Some argue *yao* is a Chinese phonetic transliteration of the Mienic term *iu*. Others believe it was acquired from the Chinese, either linking it to *moyao* (莫徭 “exempt from corvée”) which originated in the Tang Dynasty as an administrative designation for communities not required by the state to pay tax or provide corvée labor, or to *yaoren* (猺人), which appeared as an ethnic classifier in the Song Dynasty.

Chinese migrations into Yao areas, as well as cooperation with local officials and their attempts to administer the region (Faure 2006: 172–85; Shin 2006: 56–99; Yang and Mo 1996: 347–60; Yang 1996: 514–616).¹¹ Events such as these led some Kim Mun to seek new lands and greater autonomy in areas beyond the reach of the Chinese empire.

The Kim Mun first arrived in Laos around 150–200 years ago. While they did not depart from the same geographical area and their migrations were not contemporaneous, they often migrated in multi-household groups. In the mid-1800s, Kim Mun communities were already dispersed throughout southern China and northern Vietnam, and the pressures of war and social turmoil drove some Kim Mun communities into northern Laos, whereas others came in search of fertile land. Kim Mun elders tell of moving into an abandoned Namtha valley around the 1880s (along with Sida and Bit communities), where they built permanent settlements and established political and economic leadership over the locale (Badenoch and Tomita 2013: 38–54). The Kim Mun community in the Namtha region was formed from two groups; one was led by a *Tang* (鄧) clansman and came from the Sipsong Panna area, the other came from Lai Châu and was led by a *Li* (李) clansman (Badenoch and Tomita 2013: 38–42). This area quickly re-emerged as a zone of competing local and regional interests as Tai-speaking groups returned to the valley and European colonial powers pushed farther north (Grabowsky 2008, 2003; Walker 1999). By the early 1960s, the Kim Mun were engaged in the Second Indochinese War. During the conflict in Namtha, the Kim Mun sided with the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese forces, while the Iu Mien sided with the Royalist forces.¹² Victory by the Pathet Lao led some Iu Mien communities to migrate to Thailand, while others sought refuge in the United States and France. Conversely, the Kim Mun remained in the area to resettle old villages, open new lands, rebuild their lives, and, in their own eyes, take their due place in a new Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR).¹³

In spite of their turbulent history, the Kim Mun have maintained a complex, highly literate religious system.¹⁴ It is unclear how this system developed; Taoism may have been brought in by Taoist missionaries, adopted in reaction to Han-Chinese civilizing projects as an act of cultural self-preservation, or appropriated in the pursuit of spiritual salvation and higher learning (Xu 2006; Holm 2004: 32–4; Lemoine and Chiao 1991; Strickmann 1982: 23–30). Whatever its origins, Taoist ritual practices and beliefs are a core foundation of Kim Mun religion and society.

In Laos, the Kim Mun community, as a group with shared linguistic, cultural and religious practices, is a multifaceted entity; it should not be conceptualized as homogenous and bounded. The Kim Mun community can be articulated in terms of a

¹¹ Such accounts also feature in the collective memory of Kim Mun groups throughout the region.

¹² For further information on the conflict in Namtha, see Dommen (1964: 213–19) and McCoy (1972).

¹³ Relations between Kim Mun and Iu Mien in the area soured after the war, probably because they fought on opposing sides. The reasons for this are most likely bound up in the various socio-political relationships extant before the war. As Évrard (2007) highlights, Khmu groups also fought on different sides during the war for reasons that were influenced by socio-political, cultural and environmental factors. I have been told that another reason for this animosity stems from the role of Iu Mien combatants in the loss of Kim Mun ritual texts and paintings; many were destroyed during the fighting or sold in Thailand after the war.

¹⁴ Although earlier research mentions Taoist elements, it was only in the 1980s that Taoist mythology, liturgy and ritual practice became widely associated with Mien religion. See: Strickmann (1982: 23–30); Lemoine (1978: 811–14); Shiratori (1975: 7–13).

collection of Kim Mun villages, with the village an administrative unit of the state. Many Kim Mun villages include varying numbers of households that identify themselves as belonging to a different ethnicity, not to mention individual household members. Consequently, some Kim Mun village-communities also exhibit intra-village relationships that differ from other Kim Mun village-communities, which has important implications for ritual activity. In a few Kim Mun villages, the Kim Mun population is numerically a minority. Such multiethnic settings have significant bearing on political, administrative and religious leadership. Hence, calling a village a 'Kim Mun village' is perhaps inappropriate and misleading, but I do so for simplicity. This increase in multi-ethnic villages is mostly due to government policies of resettlement and rural development established after the war (Baird and Shoemaker 2005; Évrard and Goudineau 2004). Prior to the war, the movement of households (or groups of households, however linked) was much more limited and so the motivations for binding households into larger groups would have also differed. As a Kim Mun elder repeatedly told me, "you cannot think of Kim Mun villages back then like you see them now." The Kim Mun 'community' can also refer to the accumulated Kim Mun population from all villages in the area, forming a self-defined ethnic community, but this classification also has its own problems. Nonetheless, at present, the primary social unit in a Kim Mun village is the household.¹⁵

Kim Mun households are linked, not only by kinship and marriage, but also through pursuit of the shared objective of attaining prosperity and well-being for the household in the material world and ensuring salvation for their ancestors in the afterlife. Kim Mun religion provides the means to achieve this objective through ritual, and ritual practice necessitates mutual support between households. This support defines roles and responsibilities and unites households in reciprocating obligations, the effect of which, along with marriage and kinship, forms the social body of Kim Mun village-communities and the Kim Mun ethnic community in Laos. This is evident in the examples presented below: in the *ai-soŋ*, whereby households relinquish a degree of autonomy and grant authority to three ritual practitioners to act on their behalf, in the *t̄ai* and *θiu*, which require households to depend on the support of other households and incur obligations to reciprocate, and in the *t̄ei-sei*, which creates pseudo-filial relationships that bind men through each generation and across lineages. The data used in this paper were mostly obtained from Namdy Village, Luang Namtha, though data from other Kim Mun villages has also been incorporated.¹⁶

The Interface of Ritual Activity and Social Life **An Outline of Ritual Practice¹⁷**

Kim Mun religion is often described as a composite of Taoism, ancestor worship and shamanism, and although facets of all three are evident in Kim Mun ritual activity,

¹⁵ I identify the household as a family unit which makes offerings to their ancestors at a single altar; a household may encompass two or more houses, but I know of no instance of two households, defined this way, which occupy a single house.

¹⁶ The examples used below are to some extent idealized, however in the accompanying footnotes I attempt to also provide, where space allows, counterpoints or alternatives to the arguments made below.

¹⁷ The following description does not encompass all Kim Mun rituals. I have left out other Kim Mun rituals such as divinatory *ai-kwa* rituals and blessing rituals akin to the *bacii* or *sou-khouan*.

Kim Mun ritual practitioners do not explicitly make these distinctions.¹⁸ Instead, ritual practitioners employ criteria based on ritual liturgy to describe and classify their religious beliefs and practices. Kim Mun rituals can be divided into two categories according to the absence or presence of texts during a ritual: *na:m-ma:n* (喃神) and *ai-ma:n* (做神); this distinction also correlates with the objective of the ritual. *Ma:n* is a broad-spectrum term for entities not of the mortal world, and encompasses deities, spirits, demons and ghosts, and implicitly the spirits of the ancestors. *Na:m-ma:n* may be rendered as to feed and clean or purify the deities and spirits, while *ai-ma:n* means to work with, entreat, or command the deities and spirits. Formally, a key difference, other than the size and complexity of the associated rituals, is that *ai-ma:n* rituals require direct action or presume explicit results from the deities or ancestors with regard to an objective specified during the ritual, while *na:m-ma:n* rituals do not. In practice, these categories are not so tidy.

The *na:m-ma:n* rituals are mostly small rituals performed by a single ritual practitioner and last up to a few hours. They primarily focus on a household's ancestors as well as on household and mid-level functionary deities pertaining to daily life; they do not feature supreme deities of high office or groups of deities whose positions are macro-social. These rituals typically entail offerings to the ancestors and/or deities to ensure their continued contentment and favor, but can also address household matters such as minor illnesses (caused by the presence of wild spirits or the effect of the accumulation of ill deeds on the soul) or inauspicious events and bad omens (such as finding a green snake in the home).¹⁹ The instructions and verses used in *na:m-ma:n* rituals are written down in manuscripts, but these are not considered liturgical texts and are thus never present by the ritual altar. The contents for each ritual are instead memorized by the ritual practitioner. The ability to mediate between a household's members, ancestors, and household deity is crucial as it ensures the basic protection of the family lineage in the terrestrial world and its well-being in the afterlife.²⁰ All ranks of ritual practitioner, from *apprentice* to *ritual master* and *senior master*, need to be proficient in the *na:m-ma:n* rituals necessary to manage household affairs.²¹

¹⁸ Scholars of Taoism posit that the southern sect of the *Tianshi* (Celestial Masters) and *Zhengyi* (Orthodox Unity) Taoist schools shaped the framework of Mien religion, and further scholarship has linked Mien ritual with the *Meishan*, *Lüshan*, and *Tianxin Zhengfa* revelations (Xu 2006:17–69; Yang and Yang 2000: 1–84; Obi and Müller 1996; Strickmann 1982). Similarly, anthropological research has identified cultural characteristics, such as patrilineal descent and an egalitarian social structure with high esteem for community elders, that interlink with Mien religious life (Lemoine 2002; Lemoine and Chiao 1991; Guangxi Zhuangzu zizhiqu bianjizu 1987, 1984; Miles 1978).

¹⁹ An example of a *na:m-ma:n* ritual is the *na:m ðan lɔŋ* (喃神農 Ritual for the Deity of Agriculture), which is performed every year or when it is deemed necessary by a household to make offerings, express gratitude for past harvests and request the protection of future crops.

²⁰ It is customary that any man who serves as head of the household be able to perform these rituals, although at present this is not always the case. There are also instances when the head of the household is a woman or young man, neither of whom can perform *na:m-ma:n* rituals. In such instances, a relative or neighbor is often available to perform them as necessary.

²¹ Kim Mun ritual practitioners distinguish three levels of proficiency, which are, in descending order: *senior master* (*ðin-θeŋ* 先生), *ritual master* (*θai-fa* 師父), and *apprentice* (*tai-ði* 弟子). Higher ranks are achieved through the accumulation of ritual knowledge and proficiency in the requisite ritual practices.

In contrast, *ai-ma:n* rituals require the presence of ritual texts, both as functional and symbolic instruments of ritual practice.²² These rituals, while incorporating functionary deities, ancestors and household deities, also engage powerful macro-social deities and may comprise elements of worship, celebration, protection, healing, transformation and fealty. Examples include addressing serious illness or calamity, large offerings of gratitude and expressions of veneration, village-centered rituals which ally the village under tutelary deities, and initiation rites, all of which run a number of days and nights and require multiple ritual practitioners. Only ritual practitioners who have mastered the requisite skills and have therefore risen to the rank of ritual master or senior master can lead *ai-ma:n* rituals. Although apprentices can assist in them, and often do so as a method of instruction, they possess neither the necessary texts or knowledge to conduct *ai-ma:n* rituals, nor have they received sanction from the deities of the ritual practitioner (*θai-fa ma:n* 師父神) and *lou-kwən* (老君 –the deification of Laozi, highly venerated in Taoist traditions) to conduct rituals that incorporate macro-social deities. In Kim Mun society, any individual can become a ritual practitioner through initiation and proper study and can perform rituals of any form—there is no religious or social distinction between a ritual practitioner performing a *na:m-ma:n* ritual and one performing an *ai-ma:n* ritual. Only the level of study and rank achieved determines the types of rituals they are able and permitted to perform.

Kim Mun *ai-ma:n* rituals are also categorized according to ritual tradition: namely, *θai-kəŋ* (師公 Ritual Master) and *təu-kəŋ* (道公 Taoist Master). The criteria include the texts, patron deities and functions of the ritual as prescribed by each tradition. This classification is fraught with inconsistencies; nevertheless it is a distinction that Kim Mun ritual practitioners make. For instance, larger *ai-ma:n* rituals utilize rituals from both the *θai-kəŋ* and *təu-kəŋ* traditions which are performed in tandem—often intertwining—and so require the roles of *θai-kəŋ* and *təu-kəŋ* each to be filled by a ritual practitioner. However, as long as a ritual practitioner is of adequate rank and proficiency he may take up either role. When a Kim Mun youth undergoes the initiation rite he will ideally undergo initiation for both traditions. This permits him, after proper study, to perform *θai-kəŋ* and *təu-kəŋ* rituals. The division between ritual traditions does not pertain to the individual ritual practitioner but only relates to their role within the ritual; a ritual practitioner can serve as a *θai-kəŋ* or *təu-kəŋ* as required.²³

The two ritual traditions also possess distinct textual repertoires.²⁴ The *təu-kəŋ* tradition has more texts than the *θai-kəŋ* tradition, which holds the *kjau wan hu* (救患科)

²² Ritual texts can be classified in terms of the audience and the recitation language: —*kəŋ* (經) and *hu* (科) with *pei-jui* (秘語). The *kəŋ* and *hu* texts can be thought of as ritual texts containing instructions, lists and narratives, which are vocalized for the audience seated at and around the ritual altar, both human and non-human. The *pei-jui* secret texts are the dialogues between the ritual practitioner and the deities and ancestors present during the ritual. The *kəŋ* and *hu* texts are recited (chanted or sung aloud) in a southern Chinese dialect to the accompaniment of music from a drum and cymbal, whereas the *pei-jui* texts are recited (voiced but directed internally) by the lead ritual practitioner in the Kim Mun vernacular language.

²³ Despite this, the lead *θai-kəŋ* ritual practitioner can only conduct and perform the *θai-kəŋ* components of the ritual in question, and likewise for the lead *təu-kəŋ* ritual practitioner. However, other ritual practitioners may perform or help according to need, and during a ritual can be seen helping both the lead *θai-kəŋ* and *təu-kəŋ* (though never simultaneously). If the number of ritual practitioners is sufficient this crossing-over is avoided.

²⁴ For a catalogue of Kim Mun and Iu Mien ritual texts, see Höllmann and Friedrich (2004).

supreme over all others, but rituals in both traditions utilize multiple texts. The distinction between the two traditions is also revealed in their patron deities. The *θai-kəŋ* revere the *θam-ɲun* (三元 the Three Generals²⁵), who are honored as the founding masters of their ritual tradition, while the *tɔu-kəŋ* revere the *θam-tɛŋ* (三清 the Three Pure Ones). Despite this, the *θam-ɲun* also occupy a secondary position in the rituals of the *tɔu-kəŋ* and the *θam-tɛŋ* in rituals of the *θai-kəŋ*. The Kim Mun hold the *tɔu-kəŋ* tradition to be superior to that of the *θai-kəŋ*. One reason offered for this is that caring for the ancestors in the afterlife is paramount in Kim Mun religious life. In Kim Mun ritual, it is the *tɔu-kəŋ* tradition and associated rituals that incorporate the ancestors and deal with matters of the afterlife. Conversely, the *θai-kəŋ* rituals focus on household or village affairs in the terrestrial realm, a domain mediated by deities of various offices and positions. Hence it can be reasoned that *θai-kəŋ* rituals manage affairs of the living and *tɔu-kəŋ* rituals manage affairs of the afterlife.²⁶

Village Ritual and Political Authority

The *ai-soŋ* (做衆) is a calendrical village-level ritual performed on the first and second days of the second month of the lunar year.²⁷ In Namdy Village, the *ai-soŋ* is performed every third year, unless the village has experienced a period of extraordinary misfortune. For instance, in 2012, in order to address a succession of deaths through accident and illness and the destruction of rice paddies due to flooding in 2011, the village leaders decided an *ai-soŋ* was required to ensure sufficient offerings were made and that protection from the village deities was secured for 2012.

The primary purpose of the *ai-soŋ* is to reaffirm the relationship of the village with the village deities (*pun-kɛŋ* 本境).²⁸ The ritual re-establishes the fealty of the village, and theoretically every other Kim Mun village in Laos, under the tutelary village deities. In return for offerings of worthy goods, the village deities protect the community from harm, whether natural or supernatural. The village deities are reportedly the same throughout Kim Mun villages in Luang Namtha, Oudomxay and Bokeo, and include Kim Mun ancestors of old who performed great deeds. For example, the head of the Ancestral Chiefs group includes *Tang Yon-Hak* (鄧玄學), the Kim Mun leader who oversaw the establishment of Kim Mun settlements and held significant political influence in the Namtha locale.

²⁵ See Holm (1993).

²⁶ An example of the inconsistency in this division is that a *tɔu-kəŋ* ritual for cleansing the soul, *wa-ji* (化衣), is often performed for the living.

²⁷ This ritual is not performed every year; the *na:m-soŋ* (喃衆) often substitutes for it during lean years, as it requires less of the community's time and resources. Hence, in 2012, simply honoring and feeding the deities and spirits were deemed insufficient; more direct action was required. Nonetheless, the overall objective is the same and one of the two rituals will be performed at this time each year.

²⁸ Households of other ethnic groups in Kim Mun villages are also often invited to participate in this ritual.

Table 1: The Village Deities

Names and Divisions ²⁹		Identities and Roles
地主官	Divine Masters of the Land	Patrons: Protect and care for Kim Mun villages, lands and people.
	Divine Sages	Deities of Taoist/Chinese origin – includes the three lords of the three realms (celestial, terrestrial and underworld): Oversee Kim Mun villages and lands.
	Ancestral Chiefs	Ancestors of Kim Mun and Iu Mien in the Namtha region: In charge of the village deities.
	Spirits of the Land	Traditional (autochthonous) deities of the land: Of the Nyuan ethnic group. ³⁰
本境名	Village Spirits	Guardians: Protect and care for each village.
	Counsel Spirits	Ancestors of Kim Mun and Iu Mien in the Namtha region: Advise and monitor the village spirits.
	Sentinel Spirits	Defend the village perimeter.
	Officer Spirits	Spirits of other ethnic groups – known by different names: Administrative officials.
各家香火名	Spirits of the Household	Titular spirit of the household and spirit of the village (here viewed as a group of households).
各人家先名	Spirits of the Ancestors	Titular spirits of the ancestors: safeguard children and grandchildren. ³¹
众人阴阳师	Hunting Spirits	Ensure advantageous conditions and protection for hunting.
各人神农名	Agricultural Spirits	Watch over the paddies, fields and harvested crops.

Another major objective of the *ai-soŋ* is to re-affirm each household's relationship with their household deity, *pjau-ma:n* (家神). The main responsibility of the household deity is to watch over the household's members in matters of health and prosperity.³² Typically a single deity is chosen from a group of five, called *ja:ŋ-hu* (香火).³³ As each Kim

²⁹ I was not given precise names for each sub-group, so I have adapted names from the descriptions provided to me.

³⁰ For the link between the Kim Mun and Nyuan in Luang Namtha, see Badenoch and Tomita (2013: 44).

³¹ These four spirits are not the actual ancestors but spirits who care for the progeny of all family lines.

³² As noted, Kim Mun families may be spread between two or three houses, however it is the members of the house (those who consistently dwell within) that constitute the household and therefore it is only these members who are under the watch of the household deity. Households of a single lineage may have a different household deity for each respective household.

³³ Two deities are also permissible, and there are instances where deities outside this group of five have been selected. The group name *ja:ŋ-hu* precedes the name of the deity to indicate that it belongs to the group, i.e., the deity is performing the role of household deity. Deities can occupy numerous positions simultaneously and assume various names and titles. The household deities differ in Laos, China and Vietnam, however their status is more or less identical.

Mun household has an altar where the household deity and souls of the ancestors reside.³⁴ The *ja:ŋ-hu* deities can thus be thought of as protectors of the family lineage.

As described above, basic *na:m-ma:n* rituals involve the provision of goods and services to the ancestors and household deity in exchange for continued health and prosperity. While an individual ritual practitioner can perform the appropriate rituals to maintain his household's wellbeing, he cannot individually perform the *ai-ma:n* rituals necessary to ensure that his household is properly positioned under the aegis of the supreme deities, nor can he fully address his household's affairs in the spiritual and material worlds. For example, rituals to release the ancestors from the underworld (e.g., the *tɕai*) or to maintain harmony between a household and the spiritual world (e.g., the *θiu*) require several ritual practitioners. Transmission of the knowledge required to perform these rituals can only be effected by the initiation rite, which requires numerous ritual practitioners. These *ai-ma:n* rituals (discussed below) and their associated familial and social objectives incorporate supreme deities and necessitate the assistance of other ritual practitioners. Although the *ai-soŋ* concerns the relationship of the village to the village deities and is pertinent to the prosperity of the coming year, it also binds the village-community—represented by individual households and their ancestors—within a celestial bureaucracy governed by the supreme deities. It is only within this framework that protection in the material world and salvation in the afterlife is assured. A balance thus exists between the self-sufficiency and autonomy of a household and the cooperation of multiple households (here, as a village-community) to secure the welfare of each household and lineage. This cooperation is apparent in the three ritual leadership positions³⁵ that govern Kim Mun village-communities, which are called:

- | | | |
|--------------------|---|---|
| 1. <i>set-tɕu:</i> | 主 | House which constitutes the ritual seat of the village. |
| 2. <i>set-θai:</i> | 師 | Head ritual practitioner of the village. |
| 3. <i>gjaŋ-ku:</i> | 官 | Person in charge of the religious affairs of the village. |

The three ritual practitioners who serve in these positions are responsible for the performance of the *ai-soŋ* (and all village-level rituals).³⁶ This is unlike the case of the majority of rituals, in which ritual practitioners are engaged because of kinship ties, proficiency in ritual, or availability. All village-level rituals are performed in the house of the *set-tɕu*. Village members (typically representatives from each household) come to the house to help build the altar, to construct necessary ritual instruments, to prepare food and drink to be offered to the deities and ancestors and for community consumption, and to assist in the performance of the ritual, while others just relax and converse with neighbors and friends. Although recognized by the village-community as the ritual seat of the village, outside of village rituals, the house of the *set-tɕu* holds no other function; individuals do not perform rituals for their own household in the house of the *set-tɕu*.

³⁴ However, the soul is thought to be two entities: one is enshrined at the household altar while the other resides in the heavens. This bipartition of the soul is a central belief in Taoism and Chinese popular religion.

³⁵ These three positions are also found among Kim Mun villages in Yunnan and Guangxi. While the names given vary in different locales, I have been told by several ritual practitioners in China and Laos that even today all Kim Mun villages must have people performing these three roles.

³⁶ This organizational structure for governing ritual affairs in the village was also used prior to the war as a form of leadership hierarchy when large groups of Kim Mun households act in concord.

The position of *set-təu* is neither hereditary nor a lifelong appointment. Along with the *set-θai* and *gjaŋ-ku*, the position of *set-təu* is occupied for a limited period of time after which the village-community gathers, new candidates are nominated (either by themselves or others), and three new representatives are selected.³⁷ A ceremony is then performed and a stake planted in the front of the house of the *set-təu*. This informs the deities and ancestors of the new identities of the village-community's ritual leaders and discloses the location of the house serving as the new ritual seat. The *set-θai* is the lead ritual practitioner of the village-community. He is in charge of all village rituals and hence of maintaining the relationship between the village-community and the deities. The *gjaŋ-ku* is responsible for the organization of all village rituals and associated affairs.



Figure 1: The *set-θai* reciting the names of the Village Deities.

At present, in villages where the majority of the population is Kim Mun, these positions often overlap with political-administrative positions; the *set-təu*, for example, can also serve as the village chief.³⁸ However, when this is the case, authority does not reside entirely with the three ritual leaders. While village-level rituals require the village to cede authority to the chosen three ritual practitioners, there are mechanisms in place that check the extent of their power within the village. For instance, often the most senior

³⁷ One or all of the incumbents can be re-elected. A ritual may also be performed to acquire the deities' consent for the new candidates.

³⁸ In villages where the Kim Mun population is not the majority, this overlapping of positions is much less common and hence ritual and politics in the domain of the village are separated. However, within the Kim Mun component of the village, the ritual leadership positions will be occupied and the leaders will fulfill their roles accordingly.

members of the village—retired from such ritual and political roles—are involved in decision-making processes, as are the peers of the ritual leaders.³⁹ Thus, while these positions, like village-level administrative positions, carry significant social responsibilities and rights, power is diluted both by the inclusion of peer groups in major meetings and the limited tenure of the positions. The format of the *ai-soŋ* was altered after the war, whereby the present *pun-keŋ* were established as a group and incorporated into the ritual. It is also important to note the incorporation of spirits acknowledged as not belonging to the Kim Mun themselves, as well as the invitation of non-Kim Mun households to participate in the ritual.⁴⁰ The *ai-soŋ* was performed prior to the war, but performances focused on linkages between households and household deities as well as with the larger celestial framework; the concept of the village and associated village-community differed.

Ritual Activity and Household Interdependence

The *tsai* (齋) and *θiu* (醺) are two of the most vital (*ai-ma:n*) rituals in Kim Mun religion, and both are central to Taoist liturgy in southern China.⁴¹ In Taoism they are called purifications (*zhai* 齋) and offerings (*jiao* 醺) respectively, and along with ordinations (*jie* 戒) constitute the three categories under which Taoist ritual formats were first standardized (Bokenkamp 2001: 181-99). The *jiao* may be performed as a recurrent ritual for revitalizing and blessing the community or for addressing crises such as droughts or epidemics (Andersen 2008: 539-44; Davis 2001: 227-41). A modern *jiao* is a ceremony held by communities and performed by Taoist Masters and local Ritual Masters that reaffirms the semi-contractual relationship between the community and its tutelary deity and realigns their relationship within the Taoist cosmos (Schipper 1974: 324). This cosmos is presided over by the Three Pure Ones (三清) and is governed by a celestial bureaucracy administered by deities and exalted historical figures. The alignment of village and deity within the cosmos is realized through Taoist liturgy—which enacts the invested authority of the Taoist Master to mediate with the Taoist pantheon via ritualized bureaucratic processes. The *zhai*, in its traditional format, is no longer an independent ritual but is now performed as the first half of the *jiao* ritual (Andersen 2008: 539-44).⁴² In general, it is a recitation of repentances, followed by the

³⁹ Although women do not hold positions of ritual power, senior women in the village are considered part of the governance structure and are involved in decision making at the village-level. They also have their own leadership group that is responsible for matters concerning women in the village, such as work, dress, traditional skills and customary knowledge.

⁴⁰ The *pun-keŋ* are specifically honored for their past achievements and service in aiding the Kim Mun in the ritual *həp keŋ ma:n tiu* (合境神酒 Drinking with the Village Deities), which seeks their continued assistance in protecting not just the villages in which it is performed but also the greater Namtha area. The ritual was created after the war by several Kim Mun leaders.

⁴¹ For English language works on Taoist ritual in southern China and Taiwan, see Dean (1993), Lagerwey (1987), and Schipper (1985). For Chinese language sources, see Li (2007), Shi (2005), Chen (2003), and Fu (2003).

⁴² According to Andersen (2008: 539-44), the liturgical development of Taoist ritual during the Song Dynasty led to a situation in which the *zhai* and *jiao* merged and the two terms became interchangeable. The growing importance of the *jiao* component led to the use of this term as the general designation of the combined liturgy

presentation of the memorial to notify the deities of the merits accrued from repentance, after which the *jiao* begins and the deities are thanked and given offerings (Yamada 2008: 1216–17).

In the Kim Mun liturgy, the *tai* and *tiu* are performed to address major illnesses or misfortunes afflicting an individual or an entire household. The causes of the affliction can originate from various sources, such as the displeasure of ancestors, household deities or local spirits with a member (or members) of the household, or from opportunistic and hostile wild spirits. In contrast, it is also customary for a household to perform a *tiu* every three years to make offerings and pay respects to the ancestors.⁴³ The ancestors will be presented with a banquet of food, provided with rice seeds to plant in their fields, bathed and clothed in new attire and will receive a multitude of gifts. Likewise, a household will also periodically conduct a *tai* in order to release the souls of the ancestors from the underworld prisons and to provide them passage to their place in the heavens—collectively referred to as *ja:ŋ sou miu* (陽州廟). It is the *tai-kŋ* and *tou-kŋ* who mediate between households, ancestors and deities. Equipped with great powers invested by their patron deities, these ritual practitioners can navigate the rules and procedures of the celestial bureaucracy using petitions, talismans and incantations, or perform violent martial exorcisms. Kim Mun *ai-ma:n* rituals focus on the household, but ritual practitioners do not perform them for their own household; they are conducted instead by ritual practitioners from other households. The degree of this inter-household dependence becomes more and more acute the larger and more complex the required ritual.

The *tai* and *tiu* both begin in the evening.⁴⁴ The two lead ritual practitioners cleanse the ritual area, activate the altar, purify their bodies, and call on their protector-deities who will guard them from attack and be at their post throughout the ritual. Although the ritual itself will have only just begun, related work will have been carried out since morning; both rituals require detailed preparation that is not undertaken by ritual practitioners. The mother of the household, along with her daughters, relatives and women of neighboring households, will begin cooking the cauldrons of rice required for offerings and the meals provided for the ritual practitioners and other attendees.⁴⁵ This responsibility brings many women together, in particular the next generation, who learn how to manage the endeavor. Sons and nephews also help. Accompanied by friends, they slaughter the animals and prepare the meat required for offerings and food, and construct the ritual altars under the guidance of a ritual master. Although six to eight ritual practitioners are adequate to perform the *tai* and *tiu*, there are frequently many more in attendance to assist with recitation or performance. Furthermore, a few youths who have begun their studies are taught ritual practice through participation.⁴⁶ Other

of ceremonies for the living. The term *zhai* continued to be used for communal services but it became more associated with ceremonies for the dead, and today refers to Taoist funeral liturgy.

⁴³ In reality, financial situation and need determine if and when these rituals are performed.

⁴⁴ A *tai* will typically run continuously for two nights and two days (though traditionally it was three nights and three days) and a *tiu* for an evening and a day (previously two nights and two days).

⁴⁵ A ritual practitioner in Namdy Village talked of a great-aunt capable of assisting in *ai-ma:n* rituals and reciting texts. I am told women who demonstrated both interest and skill were once permitted and encouraged to undertake initiation and assist in rituals, but at present this is neither actively encouraged nor discouraged.

⁴⁶ Such as *diu-ma:n* (調神), the ritual music, dance and manipulation of objects used for ritual purposes.



Figure 2: Preparation of offerings and food.



Figure 3: Preparation of offerings and food.

members of the village or of other Kim Mun villages will also come to socialize. Although the cost of a ritual is borne by the household holding it, preparation is shared between households. A theme of a village-community begins to emerge here. The more people in attendance—either to help or watch—the more efficacious the ritual becomes, and the scene depicted above is then repeated in other households as they hold rituals.

The *tai* and *tiu* rituals can both be performed to address similar dilemmas, however in doing so they differ with regard to the texts utilized, deities invoked and methods employed.⁴⁷ The two rituals can be surmised as a series of offerings to deities and ancestors, all of which secure merit for the household. Table 2 lists customary items (often symbolic representations fabricated from bamboo paper) that are included in most offerings; large and valuable items such as buffalos, pigs or chickens (offered in the flesh) are special offerings or constitute the final offering of the ritual.

Table 2: Types of Offerings

Mun	Graph	English	Mun	Graph	English
<i>hɔŋ</i>	香	Incense	<i>na:n be</i>	錢	Spirit Money
<i>fa:ŋ</i>	花	Flowers	<i>ham</i>	銜	Meat (diced)
<i>tɔŋ</i>	灯	Oil Burner	<i>ku</i>	鼓	Drum
<i>tɕa</i>	茶	Tea	<i>tɕei</i>	旗	Flag
<i>na:ŋ</i>	食	Rice (cooked)	<i>ma</i>	馬	Horse
<i>gjei</i>	菜	Food (general vegetables)	<i>lɔ</i>	鑼	Gong
<i>dau</i>	盐	Salt	<i>tiu</i>	酒	Rice Whisky

During a ritual, these offerings are presented and requests are made for assistance in addressing the issue at hand. As different maladies require the assistance of different deities, additional offerings are made to particular deities for their explicit help. Ritual offerings constitute a significant portion of the *tai* and *tiu* rituals, thematically running the gamut from bribery to tribute. Another component is ritual exorcism. The ritual practitioner has an arsenal of tools at his disposal and an array of methods for employing them. One form of illness is caused by a wild spirit or lost soul attacking, and at times replacing, the soul of an individual. During a ritual, the tool, *bɔ-lɔŋ* (毛郎), is used by the ritual practitioner to trick the marauding soul out of the body of the ill individual and return the individual's soul to its proper place. Ancestors can also be a source of trouble. For example, a man killed during the war who had no son of his own was believed to have begun attacking his grand-nephew in an act of jealousy and regret. Through a version of the *tai*, his anger was placated and assurances made that he would receive due care.

⁴⁷ A key difference is that a *tiu* ritual does not entail offerings made at the exterior altar 城都府 (also known as *din-teŋ* 天廷—where powerful but dangerous deities not permitted to enter the household sit and receive offerings).



Figure 4: The lead *tau-koh* conducting offerings (placed on the table in the background).

The *tau* and *tiu* rituals require the support of the community both in terms of preparation and performance. This support often comes from households linked by marriage, kinship or the bond of friendship.⁴⁸ Should a household cease to offer support, the act will be reciprocated by other households in the village.⁴⁹ In order to hold an *ai-ma:n* ritual, a household requires the support of other households, and receiving this support incurs obligations to these households to support them when they hold a ritual. In sum, Kim Mun ritual engenders social norms within the village-community which reinforce inter-household networks and punish those households that do not fulfill their obligations.

Inter-lineage Networks and the Rite of Re-Birth

The *tau-sei* (戒子) ritual is a cornerstone of Kim Mun religion and a central medium for the reproduction of Kim Mun society through each generation. The ritual itself effects a metaphysical transformation ('re-birth' in Kim Mun vernacular) of a male youth; it is not contingent upon physiological changes indicative of puberty rites nor tied to an age of majority (Turner 1966). The *tau-sei* is undertaken by youths between the

⁴⁸ Ritual practitioners are usually paid for their services with choice cuts from a sacrificed pig. Money is also often given, but payment is, or at least should be, an ancillary motivation for a ritual practitioner to perform.

⁴⁹ If a household is without a resident ritual practitioner, other ritual practitioners will continue to perform rituals for the household provided its members assist their household during rituals, e.g., in matters of preparation.

ages of 12 and 17, but can be performed for younger youths and men up to old-age. The transformation, and thereby initiation, of the youth is measured by the conferral of a ritual name, the bestowal of registers, and the provision of protector-deities from both the *θai-kəŋ* and *təu-kəŋ* traditions.

The transformation of the youth is enacted in two domains: celestial and societal. First, the initiated youth receives two ritual names, which are recorded under the auspices of their respective patron deities in the heavenly realm—i.e., the *θam-nun* of the *θai-kəŋ* tradition and the *θam-teŋ* of the *təu-kəŋ* tradition. The youth is no longer deemed a child by the deities and is therefore no longer under the protection of *tai-mu* (帝母 Flower Goddess and Protector of Children). Instead, he now possesses his own protector-deities and is accepted as an initiate by the deities of the ritual practitioner. The youth also receives registers, which confer the authority (but not yet the means—this is achieved through study) to invoke his protector-deities and to perform rituals incorporating his ancestors and minor deities. Initiation is confirmed by a contract, one for each tradition, which outlines its precepts and rewards the youth with his ‘passport’ to the heavenly realm—another copy is transmitted to the heavens and kept on record.⁵⁰ Second, the youth is reborn in the eyes of the community. His ritual names now bind him to the lineage of his ancestors via the familial clan-name and sacerdotal generation-name (*ŋu tai pan* 五代班). The generation-name is a group of five names. Each ritual tradition has its own group, one of which is allocated to each generation of initiates. While the clan-name is inherited and the given-name chosen by the youth’s father and teachers, the generation-name alternates in perpetuity.⁵¹

Table 3: Generation-Names

<i>θai-kəŋ</i>		<i>təu-kəŋ</i>	
法	<i>pap</i>	道	<i>təu</i>
應	<i>eŋ</i>	經	<i>keŋ</i>
顯	<i>hin</i>	玄 or 金	<i>jon</i> or <i>kjam</i>
勝	<i>θeŋ</i>	雲	<i>wan</i>
院	<i>nun</i>	妙	<i>miu</i>

Initiation alone does not grant the youth immediate rights or privileges within the community, as he is physically and psychologically not yet an adult, but it does guarantee their acquisition at a future date. Typically, when the youth has mastered basic *na:m-ma:n* rituals and is married and has a child, he will be deemed an adult. According to custom, men who have not undertaken the *təi-sei* are not considered full members of the community and are therefore seldom permitted to take up positions of authority or participate in decision-making at the village-level.⁵²

⁵⁰ The *θai-kəŋ* and *təu-kəŋ* contracts are known as *θou jam tip* (左陰牒) and *jau jaŋ tip* (右陽牒), respectively.

⁵¹ The example presented here is of the *taŋ* (鄧) clan. The order of the names differs between clan-names; differences in order within clan-names and between locales, however, were also evident and usually explained as errors.

⁵² The adherence to traditional religious practices and its influence on social structure varies between Kim Mun villages. I can speculate that this is due in part to the number of ritual practitioners living in a village and the

The complete rite can last seven days and nights.⁵³ The youth's father will consult a ritual practitioner to set an appropriate date to begin the *tæi-sei*. Once set, the father will seek out and invite six ritual practitioners to fill the six roles of the *tæi-sei*.

Table 4: Six Roles of the Initiation Rite⁵⁴

<i>θai-kəŋ</i>			<i>təu-kəŋ</i>		
<i>kai-tu</i>	戒度師	Master of the precepts	<i>tæŋ-tu</i>	正度師	Master of the orthodoxy
<i>jen-kjau</i>	引教師	Master of the teachings	<i>ka:n-tu</i>	監度師	Master who examines
<i>wək-ði</i>	畫字師	Master of the script	<i>təŋ-dan</i>	洞坛師	Master of the altars
(or <i>pou-kwei</i>)	(保舉師)	(Master of guarantees)	(or <i>pou-kin</i>)	(保見師)	(Master who protects)

The selection of a ritual practitioner is influenced by his relationship to the father and son, and their proficiency in ritual practice. First, the relationship of the youth to the six ritual practitioners is imperative to the teacher-student bond that exists between them after the initiation. These six teachers are responsible for instructing the youth in ritual practice and proper behavior. Relatives and men who are close friends will often take a role in the *tæi-sei* for each other's sons; for a father to perform in the initiation of his son is anathema to the deities and ancestors and is reproved by the community. Informal systems also develop whereby a man will accept a role in the *tæi-sei* of, for example, the grandsons of his six teachers. Second, the competence of the ritual practitioner is important for the quality of instruction given to the youth, so highly skilled ritual practitioners are also in great demand.⁵⁵ The *tæi-sei* effectively binds successive generations to their teachers and incurs obligations for each initiate with regard to ritual performance and support for their teachers and their households.

A powerful theme of re-birth runs throughout the rite. I will elaborate on one component of the ritual which brings this theme to the foreground. The youth, in traditional Kim Mun clothing, occupies a room secluded from the main ritual area and only appears when required to participate in the ritual.⁵⁶ A large blanket symbolizing a womb is wrapped over him. It is within the womb that the latent skills and knowledge of the ritual practitioner are instilled in the youth. However, the womb is not of his mother but is the womb of the ritual practitioner (often represented by the youth's father), and

community's demography (in cases where the community has merged with that of another ethnic group to become a single village).

⁵³ If funds are insufficient or if the son is not considered ritual master material, a father may elect to conduct a smaller version: the *tæi-θai* (戒師) or *tæi-təu* (戒道). Here, the youth still receives a ritual name, registers and protector-deities, but only those corresponding to the tradition under which he is initiated. These two smaller forms of the rite are of course less time consuming and expensive.

⁵⁴ The English language translations are offered as a rough interpretation of the roles.

⁵⁵ An initiate may seek out a ritual practitioner who is not one of his teachers to serve as an instructor. The rite does not limit the relationship in this manner. However, if a youth wishes to do so (perhaps as one of the six teachers has passed away) the *dau-tu θai-bu* (投度师父) ritual must first be performed.

⁵⁶ It is possible for up to three siblings or agnatic cousins of the same generation to be initiated together.

it is he who ‘gives birth’ to the initiated youth.⁵⁷ In the room, one of the ritual practitioners will introduce the youth to the deities and ancestors, and the youth will pay respects and present offerings accordingly. The youth will also read and write the texts which contain all the *tau* (咒 incantations) used in Kim Mun ritual. This learning is acted out, and the names and texts are recited and written in mimicry. It is symbolic of the basic skills with which a ritual practitioner is by definition imbued, and which when re-born he (the youth) must activate through study.⁵⁸

On the final day of the rite, the moment arrives for the initiation of the youth into the two ritual traditions and his re-birth into the world. First, the youth is initiated into the *thai-koh* tradition. He will remove the blanket and don the red robe (*bu-wah ji-hah* 婆王衣紅) of the *thai-koh*. Seated in front of the main altar, a *thai-koh* ritual practitioner will cleanse the body and soul of the youth of any harmful entities. The ritual practitioner does this, quite theatrically, by shooting a bamboo rifle⁵⁹ with ammunition made of paper and rice-wine. Now pure of body and soul, the *thai-koh* ritual practitioners begin the gestation of the youth, represented by three coins connected with white string and draped in a Y-shape across the head of the youth. As gestation proceeds, a coin is cut, with each coin representing a three-month period.⁶⁰ After the final coin is cut—nine months—a white cord that joins the *thai-koh* ritual practitioner with the youth, symbolizing the umbilical cord, is severed and the youth is re-born. On completion of the *thai-koh* initiation, the youth puts the robe of the *tau-koh* (*tham-ten ji-bok* 三清衣服) on over the red robe. The *tau-koh* ritual practitioners initiate the youth into the *tau-koh* tradition in the same format as the *thai-koh*. Once completed, the youth is presented with the accoutrements, registers and protector-deities of both traditions, and the rite is brought to a close through a proclamation that the youth has been initiated and gratitude to the deities and ancestors is then expressed through the final offering.

The necessity of producing male progeny in Kim Mun society brings up an interesting phenomenon: adoption. Kim Mun society is patrilineal and without sons, the lineage ends. Furthermore, if the family line produces no male offspring then there is no one to perform the rituals required to care for the ancestors in the afterlife.⁶¹ Adoption is a widely accepted practice used by parents to obtain a son; some families cannot conceive children while others only have daughters.⁶² Once adopted, a ritual is performed to place

⁵⁷ This is a practical reason why a father cannot perform in his son’s initiation rite.

⁵⁸ Traditionally, the initiation rite ran for many more days and I was told that the youth would be required to learn the texts by heart while confined to the room.

⁵⁹ Bamboo crossbows, a more traditional instrument, are also used.

⁶⁰ For the *thai-koh* initiation, the three coins represent the Three Generals and for the *tau-koh* initiation, the Three Treasures (三寶): namely the *tau* (道 Tao), *keh* (經 Scripture) and *thai* (師 Master). The three terms can also refer to the names of Three Pure Ones; see Lagerwey (1987: 169–237).

⁶¹ If care for the ancestors is discontinued, their place in the heavens may be forfeited, and eventually they will be lost as wild spirits with no home or purpose, possibly taking revenge on their own and other families.

⁶² As a social norm, adoption is well supported; a family may adopt a child of a relative or friend in their own or another Kim Mun village. Otherwise, there are channels via local markets and the hospital that feed information about children available for adoption for a price. I cannot comment on the psychological effects of adoption for the child or parents, yet I suspect they are more acute than acknowledged here.



Figure 5: Three apprentices performing the * ai-k  * initiation rite for a Kim Mun youth (seated).

the boy under the protection of *tai-mu*, introduce him to his ancestors, and select his name. There is no stigma attached to adoption, and the boy will be treated as if he were born of his adopted parents and will assume all familial rights and privileges that come with his position in the household. When the boy reaches the appropriate age, he will undertake the initiation rite as a son of the family lineage into which he was adopted. A son is one of the most primary concerns for a family.⁶³ It is the male line that ensures the continuation of the lineage through the initiation of successive generations of male progeny and their care of the ancestors. It is also through the male line that women are assured their own protector-deities and place in the heavens. Although a woman keeps her own surname when she marries, she marries into the family and ancestors of her husband and it is through her husband and their sons that they both secure their place in the heavenly realm.⁶⁴ The *t  i-sei* ritual not only links successive generations of a lineage but also binds males of each generation to other households as a teacher or an apprentice. These relationships carry their own religious responsibilities and both straddle existing familial bonds and form new social relationships.

⁶³ Kim Mun society values both sons and daughters; families also adopt daughters, and the role of young women in the household and their involvement in maintaining cultural knowledge and practices is equally important.

⁶⁴ Her husband is, however, required to include his wife's ancestors—three generations—in all rituals that include his own ancestors. After marriage, females typically maintain very strong links with their siblings, and their influence on men to ensure the lineages of their siblings are maintained is quite strong. Lemoine (2006) notes that kinship networks via females tie village households together more efficiently than relations through male descent.

Social implications of Ritual Activity

Kim Mun rituals predominantly focus on addressing the needs of the individual, their household and, by extension, its lineage. However, as a ritual system it inculcates the necessity of inter-household support. The impact of this dependence and the incurred obligations spans multiple layers of social relations within a Kim Mun village and the greater ethnic community. As described above, the relationships created between teacher and student by the *tæi-sei* ritual engender enduring obligations that traverse households, villages and lineages. The array of *ai-man* rituals requires support from other households, and a household must fulfill its obligation to other households in-kind—those who are senior in the village have ample influence to reproach those who are not. These obligations can project across villages and lineages, where support, such as for a son-in-law's household, is also common (see Lemoine 2006). So long as the notion of an after-life and a belief in the need to care for one's ancestors dominates Kim Mun culture, a household and its members can only ensure their own prosperity and salvation if they continue to perform the requisite rituals and, in return, to fulfill the obligations they incur. Even if a household was to rely solely on pharmaceutical medicine and refrain from using rituals to address health issues, the rituals needed to care for its ancestors and to maintain its lineage would still subject it to obligations to other households. Furthermore, all households are required to assist in, or at the very least present offerings in, village-level rituals. Hence the complete cessation of all ritual activity by a household would disconnect it from a central mode of Kim Mun religious and social life, and in consequence the village-community.

Ritual activity among Kim Mun villages in Laos is neither antagonistic toward nor aligned with the state or notions of a national citizenry. Having sided with the Pathet Lao during the war, they have faced little of the overt suspicion that some other ethnic groups received, though traces of the stigma of being 'newcomers' and of the *Lao Soung* designation remain. In the context of the modern village in (rural) Laos, the concept of village solidarity is pervasive, in part due to government efforts to administrate and control the population (Baird and Shoemaker 2005; Évrard and Goudineau 2004). Village-level rituals such as the *ai-soṅ* have developed a symbiotic relationship with this notion of village solidarity, and now in addition to the religious component, such rituals underscore ethnic identity as well as village harmony; in 2012, a Kim Mun New Year celebration (the religious component was postponed), endorsed by the provincial government with help from Kim Mun working in local government, brought together Kim Mun from villages across northern Laos to a single village to celebrate their shared ethnic identity. The effect of the state is much more prevalent in Kim Mun rituals that operate above the level of the household (see Petit 2013 for an example among the Khmu.) In villages where the Kim Mun live with other ethnic groups, despite varying degrees of tension due to dissimilar or conflicting cultural practices, efforts are made to incorporate all members of the village within village-level rituals in the name of solidarity—either nominally or by their actual presence/participation in the ritual.⁶⁵ The religious

⁶⁵ There are specific names, which correlate to one's clan-name, used in Kim Mun rituals, and a list exists that includes names to be used for the clan-names or family names belonging to other ethnic groups (apart from the

objectives remain, but the emphasis on solidarity and harmony has greater voice in this current epoch of settled, and in many cases multiethnic, village-communities. Although the leadership positions associated with village rituals existed prior to the permanent settlement of villages after the war (what might better be thought of as supra-household rituals and not village rituals), the current administrative system for governing village political life has reconfigured the formation of these roles—especially in multiethnic villages—and the conceptualization of the village in religious terms, with the creation, for instance, of the ritual *Drinking with the Village Deities*. Nonetheless, in the majority of rituals, which are performed at the household level, the impact of the state has been minimal.



Figure 6: Banner announcing the 2012 New Year festival (written in Sino-Mun) as a cultural festival (written in Lao and English).

While the links between ritual activity and social life are pervasive at the level of the household, village and ethnic community, at the individual level it is more ambiguous. Individual aspirations can run counter to what might, in the present context, be of benefit for the household and village community. In the last thirty years, the growing relevance and importance of village rituals has been offset by a decrease in the performance of *ai-ma:n* rituals. A Kim Mun elder, who is not a ritual practitioner, remarked that since the end of the war, government-NGO development projects, formal education and news broadcasts on television have changed people's perspectives on religion in terms of utility. People may go to the local hospital instead of holding a ritual when a family member is ill or address 'hard times' without resorting to the assistance of deities through rituals. Alternatively, a senior ritual practitioner locates a problem with the unwillingness of youth to study the body of Kim Mun religious knowledge. He argues

Iu Mien). I do not know when or how this list was developed, but it is indicative of the changing nature of Kim Mun ritual and the manifestation of multiethnic spaces within Kim Mun ritual activity.

that there are too few who can properly perform the rituals, as is also indicated in the *kjen* above. His issue lies with the loss of ritual knowledge more than with changes in use or frequency of ritual performances. While neither statement contradicts the other, they highlight two key phenomena occurring within the Kim Mun community. First, the motivations and uses for ritual activity are shifting, and second, a reconfiguration of religious knowledge as a form of cultural and economic capital within the village and the ethnic community is underway as access to new forms of economic and cultural capital outside the village increases.

Economic modernization in northern Laos has brought new technologies and opportunities for local communities: communication technologies, cash-crop farming and access to new markets, affordable transportation and public education are just some examples. Kim Mun in Namdy Village have recently reestablished connections with 'kin' in China and Vietnam, which has fostered visits between groups, the exchange of cultural materials such as songs recorded on DVDs, and the replication of ritual texts once thought lost. Youth have also begun attending tertiary colleges in both countries, rubber cultivation methods were acquired from 'kin' in Yunnan, and a senior ritual practitioner has also traveled to Mengla to perform in a *tæi-sei* ritual. There is concern about an impending loss of 'traditional' knowledge. Yet with the formation of new networks with other Kim Mun in China and Vietnam, as well as a deepening association with a growing cultural Sinosphere, reconfigurations of ethnic identity and new interpretations of religion and culture continue to take shape. I do not venture to guess what impact this will have on ritual activity and social life in Kim Mun villages, nor how religious and cultural affiliations with a cultural Sinosphere may influence Kim Mun perceptions of ethnic solidarity and identity as citizens of Laos. The ramifications of these developments will however be played out in concert with other Kim Mun communities further afield as they continue to reconnect, and as region-wide economic and cultural forces further bear on northern Laos.

A ritual's primacy is its objective, but the cohesion and sense of unity that ritual creates helps shape social life in Kim Mun villages. Perhaps one of the most significant aspects of Kim Mun ritual activity is the precept that a ritual practitioner cannot perform in *ai-ma:n* rituals for his own household. This is despite the fact that there is clear evidence of alterations or modifications to *ai-ma:n* rituals, such as shortening sections, reducing the duration or removing elements, which are readily acknowledged by ritual practitioners. However, upon pressing to know why this taboo remained, I was told that the deities absolutely forbade it: "such a thing cannot be done." The obligations ritual activity produces, which in an increasingly urbanized and individualized milieu might be deemed a burden, will endure as long as ritual activity continues and this taboo remains. There are men who have opted out at the individual level and chosen not to undertake their ritual studies, yet as members of households, they rarely fail to meet their obligations. Both young and old frequently affirm that it is important to do so, not just for one's household but also for village and ethnic solidarity. There is thus an impasse: the benefits offered by formal education, cash-crop farming and urban employment require an investment of time and effort, which detracts from the time available for ritual studies. Despite changes to ritual practices, there persists a strong desire to continue these ritual practices, or at least some of them, especially those that also express identity and ethnic solidarity. This is particularly true for the *tæi-sei*, which is vital not just for its religious

purposes but also because the name bestowed during the ritual is fundamental to Kim Mun social identity for the husband, his wife and their children. There are many who believe it is important, if not imperative, for such rituals to continue and for religious knowledge to be preserved, but at present, few are willing to invest the time and effort needed to do this.

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The Ongoing Invention of a Multi-Ethnic Heritage in Laos ¹

Yves Goudineau²

Abstract

The multi-ethnic nature of Laos has long been part of its official discourse. However, when referring to a national culture, it seemed until recently that Lao historical heritage was considered its only foundation. Local folklore, mostly song and dance, was showcased, but many aspects of ethnic minority social organization and belief were regarded as backward and superstitious. By contrast, Lao PDR currently pays special attention to “the fine cultures and traditions of all ethnic groups,” with the clear objective of satisfying the desire for authenticity sought by tourists. About five hundred villages across the country have been awarded the status of “cultural villages,” and several provincial museums devoted to local culture have been recently created. The article is concerned with this official exhibition of ethnic diversity, which is paradoxically taking place against a background of accelerated standardization of social and cultural diversity due to administrative pressures and resettlement processes. It discusses how the so-called ethnic cultures tend to be a negotiated mix of the villagers’ self-presentation (with some ethnic groups better prepared for this than others), provincial cultural inventions and borrowed Lao norms which were strongly encouraged by state officials.

Introduction

How does one assert a ‘national culture’ and, within this national culture, what place should be given to different specific ethnicities? To a greater or lesser degree, almost every modern country faces this issue and its related choices in terms of management of a multi-ethnic society. But, depending on those choices, the issue may become either an asset or a liability. While some countries are willing to publicly debate this topic, others implement coercive policies that are not supposed to be discussed (see Brown 2004a; 2004b).

In this respect, Laos—officially a multi-ethnic nation (*paxaxon Lao banda phao* –‘the multi-ethnic Lao people’)—is in an experimental phase. Authorities face the difficult task of having to invent distinct cultural traditions for the 49 officially registered ethnic groups, almost 50 percent of which are ‘ethnic minority,’ and actively involve people in their assigned self-presentation. (Goudineau and Evrard 2006; Pholsena 2006).

Speaking of the invention of the social or the cultural is nothing new. Since the influential writings of Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983) or Benedict Anderson (1983), there have been countless books, articles or projects beginning with titles such as ‘The invention of,’ ‘The making of’ or ‘The fabric of,’ or titles that use present participles such as ‘Creating,’ ‘Imagining,’ ‘Building,’ and ‘Configuring.’³

¹ This article is based on the slightly modified text of a keynote lecture given at the Fourth International Conference on Lao Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison on April 19, 2013.

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³ See, for Southeast Asia among others, Horstmann and Wadley (2006); Michaud and Forsyth (2011); Ivarsson (2008); Harms (2011).

The main idea behind the titles involves process, an idea of social construction. Everything is 'in the making' and a multitude of actors and networks participate together in building, inventing or imagining the cultural and the social. Today, Laos seems particularly well suited to this kind of approach, as an attentive observer can observe, almost from month to month, the enactment of new policies, the emergence of new discourses or the invention of new cultural emblems, on a national level and in the provinces, districts and villages (Berliner 2010; Grabowsky 2011; Ladwig 2008).

On the other hand, common sense is generally resistant to this idea that culture is an 'invention' and would impulsively favor an 'essentialist' approach based on diverse forms of culturalism. There is an increasing desire among tourists today to encounter 'real, authentic cultures.' And Laos, a country whose borders were long closed to outsiders, appears to offer many travellers guarantees of the authenticity they seek among 'ethnic minorities' (Petit 2008; Tappe 2011). For a long period, this had not in fact been entirely false when compared with some neighbouring countries. Until fairly recently, some village cultures could survive in Laos better than elsewhere in the Mekong region.⁴ In some cases anthropologists have found it challenging to try to understand the conditions under which certain social structures or certain 'patterns of thought' had been able to resist the ups and downs of history for so long.⁵

But the situation has changed dramatically over the past twenty years. The development policies that have been adopted, aimed at permanently erasing the most obvious signs of supposed archaisms, have gradually banished from the culture of "ethnic minorities" much of what remained of social organization and ancient systems of belief. And there is clearly a certain degree of misapprehension among visitors today who think they are seeing 'traditional villagers' as they ignore the dramatic changes these populations have generally experienced in their way of life. Over the past ten years in particular, the cultural landscape of entire regions has been transformed due to the massive displacement of villages across the country. As a result, in southern Laos, most of the villages where I had been able to work some fifteen or twenty years ago no longer exist.

It is against the background of these tremendous social and economic changes, which have affected all the provinces from north to south, that I consider the recent development of multiculturalism in Laos, one of the aims of which, paradoxically, is to satisfy the desire for authenticity sought by visitors.

From Archaism and Backwardness in the 1990s to the 'Opening Up' of Remote Areas in the 2000s

Mainly because of the political splits and war dislocations that Laos has experienced over a period of almost fifty years, few outside observers have been able to witness the full evolution process over the period. Most have observed just certain periods, and often in particular regions. Some have experienced the country before the war, others during the war, a few others in the years just following 1975, and many researchers and experts have only been able to work in Laos for the past ten or fifteen years. If not unique in the world, this situation of such fragmented knowledge, in time and space, of the contemporary history of a country, is nevertheless not very

⁴ On the politics of neighbouring states towards minorities, cf. McCaskil and Kampe (1997); Turton (2000); Duncan (2004); Masako (2013).

⁵ See Goudineau (2008; 2009) about the resilience of a circular model among Austro-Asiatic villages.

common. The idea of ‘Laos Studies’ reflects this difficulty of making a whole picture from so many scattered points of view. In this respect, my knowledge of Laos is rooted in the 1990s and I will begin with a brief overview of my own experience, which will explain ‘where I am coming from.’

The populations in the region of Upper Xekong, in the provinces of Saravan and Xekong, among whom I lived in the 1990s,⁶ all belonged to the Austro-Asiatic (or Môn-Khmer) ‘stock.’ They were Ta Oi (Ta-Oih), Katang and Pacoh on the right bank of the Xekong River, and Alak (Arak), Ngé (Ngkriang) and Kantu/Katu on the left bank. They all spoke languages from the same Katuic family, and formed a sort of ‘cultural continuum.’⁷ Village life, with its intense ritual activity, seemed to have started up again at the end of the conflicts. In Samui District, the Pacoh villages were made up of two or three magnificent longhouses, each one housing, on occasion, more than one hundred people. In Kaleum, the Ngé or Kantu villages were circular, with a communal house in the center (Cf. Goudineau 2009). All these villages had remarkable architectural features. And the black and white photos that I took at that time gave the impression of a far distant past, as they were so similar to the very rare photographs of these almost inaccessible regions in the 1920s or 1930s.

Yet, if a traditional way of life had resumed that followed some old patterns in terms of social structure and religious practices, this was largely an illusion of archaism. Even if they looked ancient, these villages were recent; most were less than eight years old. They were already, in fact, the result of a preliminary phase of reorganization of territory after the war, but with different policies depending on the province. In Saravan, before 1990, a proactive policy had already favoured certain groupings of multi-ethnic villages, while in Xekong, the policy had been different. Xekong was established in 1984 and has long been considered a ‘Lao Theung’⁸ province because 98 percent of the population is from ethnic Austro-Asiatic groups. In gratitude for their contribution during the war, many villagers in Xekong were allowed to return to their ancient sites and rebuild villages in the style of their ‘ancestors’ after 1985.

At that time, any anthropologist attached to a foreign research institution was highly suspect (except for the Vietnamese), so I was officially ‘labelled’ an ‘ethnic minorities expert’ (*xiaoxan sonphao* in Lao), and I worked as such, first as a consultant to medical non-governmental organizations (NGOs),⁹ and then with the United National Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), working on informal education projects. As a consultant for UNESCO and UNDP, I also carried out several specific missions in the north of the country, namely in Oudomxay and Luang Namtha, which

⁶ I spent two years in Saravan in 1993–1994 where I carried out an extensive ethnography in the remote districts of Toumlan, Ta Oi and Samui—at that time extremely difficult to access. Because local authorities would not allow me to spend more than two nights in the same village at first, I had to walk from village to village for many weeks. But it gave me an overview of the whole region that was crossed by one of the junctions of the Hô Chi-Minh trail during the war. Then, in Xekong, after 1995, I progressively gained the confidence of the provincial Governor who, after several missions spent in different ethnic villages, let me settle down for eight months in a remote Kantu village in Kaleum District.

⁷ See, on the ‘cultural continuum’ in southern Laos: Goudineau (2008).

⁸ “Lao of the mountain slopes,” a generic term referring to ethnic minorities speaking Austro-Asiatic (Mon-Khmer) languages. About the common—but nonofficial—ternary classification: “Lao Loum,” “Lao Theung” and “Lao Soung,” see, for instance: Stuart-Fox and Kooyman (1992).

⁹ Notably MSF (*Médecins sans frontières / Doctors without borders*) in Saravan and ACF (*Action contre la Faim*) in Xekong.

enabled me to compare the situations of minorities in the south with those in northern Laos. I was therefore confronted very early on with the issue of ‘multi-ethnicity’ and cultural diversity, and I became particularly disturbed by the obvious contempt shown by many officials in the provinces toward ethnic minorities, who were generally regarded as embodying different types or degrees of social and cultural backwardness.

In 1996, with the moral support of the late Professor Georges Condominas, and in cooperation with the Institute of Research on Culture (IRC), I agreed to coordinate an International UNESCO Conference on ‘The Intangible Heritage of Ethnic Minorities’ in Vientiane (Goudineau 2003). The conference was more political than scientific, and the Lao government had been diplomatically pressured to recognize the need to promote and preserve ‘minority heritages’; it also opened the way for foreign researchers to study non-Lao-Tai ethnic groups, however, which had hitherto (at least since 1970) been almost impossible. Moreover, I also witnessed, with some concern—almost at the outset, in 1994 and 1995—the unexpected and sudden relocation of several ethnic minority villages in Xekong and Muang Sing where I was working—and I decided to note the economic and cultural effects of displacement and regrouping of villages during the first months of relocation. In 1997, upon understanding that the relocation was the consequence of an unspoken policy of general rural planning, coordinated at the central level, I initiated the first survey research on the resettlement of villages on a national scale. The survey took place in 6 provinces in 22 districts and involved over 1,000 families. I was able to carry out this enquiry with the support of UNDP and UNESCO and with the help of a young team of researchers and local education officials. When published, the survey report came as a shock, both for some foreign donors and stakeholders, who had financed and developed projects in relocated villages, and for the provincial authorities, who often reluctantly admitted that they were facing many difficulties in applying the resettlement scheme (Goudineau 1997, 2000; Goudineau and Evrard 2004).

I left Laos in late 1999 and returned at the end of 2011 (with only short trips in between). Upon my return, I found a very different country from the one I had left nearly twelve years earlier, and I was stunned by the changes, especially in the districts in the south where I had previously worked. In Ta Oi district, a huge road had been constructed, and long lorries loaded with logs now drive directly toward Vietnam. Electricity had been installed in Samui. And the district town of Kaleum—just a few shacks and small houses on stilts in 1999—had become a real, small town with a market, schools and brick houses.

The political challenge of ‘opening up’ remote areas may appear to have been won, but the reason behind it has often been the implementation of national or provincial ‘plans’ involving dams, infrastructure or mining projects. These changes have led to a profound territorial transformation—with a wide redistribution of populations and new type of village organization. The questions asked by the 1996 UNESCO conference, and even more so, the concerns expressed in the Report on ‘resettlement’ (Goudineau, 1997) remain completely valid some fifteen years later, and in both cases, the issue of multi-ethnicity is central.

The Promoted Heritage of Laos

The national discourse on the ‘Lao multi-ethnic heritage’ (*paxaxon Lao banda phao moladok* in Lao) has developed considerably over the past 20 years. I will discuss

this point, then mention some state innovations in the ‘presentation’ of multi-ethnicity, and finally, I will discuss some recent initiatives in the provinces, such as ‘cultural villages’ (*ban vatthanatam* in Lao), which attempt to combine ‘development and heritage.’

What Does Heritage Mean in a Multi-Ethnic Country?

In a statement to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in Geneva in February 2012, the Minister of Justice of Laos, Dr. Chaleun Yiapaoheu, who is ethnic Hmong himself, outlined what ‘a multi-ethnic nation’ was believed to be in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR).¹⁰ He noted that: “In the Lao PDR all Lao people regardless of their ethnicity hold Lao citizenship.” He added that, “the preservation of the culture of all ethnic groups, large and small, is recognized by the government as a driving force for the development and preservation of national identity in the country.” But before acknowledging this, he also stated that national development is the priority and that “the relocation policy is...a crucial component in poverty reduction programmes,” even if the government “is well aware that the establishment of development villages and cluster villages in the rural areas affects the traditional livelihoods of the people in the mountainous areas” (p. 4).

Actually, this speech about multi-ethnicity and the priority given to national development could apply to all the neighbouring countries of Laos, except for the recognition of citizenship, which must still be negotiated in countries such as Thailand.¹¹ However, the speech and its implications do not carry the same weight in Laos as they do elsewhere, because Laos has the distinction that roughly two-fifths of its population are ethnically and culturally non-Lao-Tai.¹² This puts the Lao cultural majority in a very different position from the Kinh (Việt) in Vietnam, the Han in China¹³ or the Khmer in Cambodia, where minorities represent a relatively small or very low percentage of the population. Laos has another distinctive feature specificity, which is that there is a population living in north-east Thailand, typically known as ‘Isan,’ which is linguistically and culturally Lao, and is three times greater than the population of Laos itself. In a way the Lao majority is in an uncertain cultural space,

¹⁰ ‘Opening Statement by H.E. Dr. Chaleun Yiapaoheu, Minister of Justice, Head of the Lao Delegation, at the Eightieth Session of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,’ February 28, 2012, Geneva, Switzerland.

¹¹ See McCaskill and Kampe (1997); Turton (2000); Tanabe (2008); King and Wilder (2003 cf. chapter 6, ‘Ethnicity, Identity and Nationalism’); Masako (2013).

¹² Any calculation remains largely arbitrary, given the lack of systematic and reliable ethno-linguistic surveys carried out nationwide. But if we accept the now official classification of four major ethno-linguistic families, according to the latest census, the Lao-Tai family that includes Lao but also Tai Nua, Tai Dam, Tai Deng, Lue, Phouan, etc. accounts for less than 50% of the population (so the actual ‘Lao’ only represent a much lower percentage). For their part, the Austro-Asiatics, the oldest and most diverse language family, comprise approximately 35% of the population, Yao and Miao (Hmong) almost 10%, and the Tibeto-Burmans around 5%. For this classification to be complete, we must add urban minorities, mainly Vietnamese and Chinese, plus many populations belonging to ethno-linguistic ‘minority’ families mentioned above who migrated to the city after leaving their villages.

¹³ I include China here, even though it is not considered to be part of Southeast Asia, partly because many minority ethnic groups present in the Indochinese Peninsula (Yao, Hmong, Tibeto-Burmese, Tai, etc.) originate directly from China and occupy large areas in Yunnan, Guangxi and Guizhou, and partly because a relevant comparison can be made with the Lao situation in terms of a political model regarding ethnicity.

in between cultures. As a nation, before envisaging a 'multi-ethnic' culture, Laos first had to invent a 'Lao' culture.

Several researchers have shown to what extent the Lao PDR continues to reinforce a national identity largely based on Lao history and on Lao Buddhism, in other words on the culture of what is considered the majority group.¹⁴ The *École Française d'Extrême-Orient* (EFEO – French School of Asian Studies), which is the oldest research institution in Laos, was at the heart of this fabrication of a Lao culture during the colonial period. Since 1901, its scholars have been actively involved in the reconstruction of the monumental emblems of Vientiane, particularly That Luang and Vat Phra Keo. They also wanted—in opposition to the long-term Siamese influence—to identify a 'Lao' literature and a 'Lao' art, and they created a Buddhist institute to train monks in 'Lao' Buddhism.¹⁵ It should be noted, however, that outside of the colonial context, their work, which was generally based on quality research, also served as a scientific guarantee to the emergence of Lao nationalism and is still the basis of some current research in Laos itself.

The most amazing contribution, in this respect, is that of Charles Archaimbault, also previously affiliated with EFEO. He was a philologist and ethnologist who did research in Laos in the 1950s, particularly in Xieng Khouang and Champassak. A former resistance fighter against the Nazis during World War II, and an anti-colonial activist, he worked deliberately toward promoting Lao nationalism after independence. His very extensive research aims to demonstrate—on a historical, religious and social level—the existence and coherence of original structures that would be specifically 'Lao,' and he provided a considerable amount of information to this end. He carried out investigations in many villages across the country to study Lao traditions and legends, but he also translated local chronicles and compared cycles of rituals in several Lao towns along the Mekong.¹⁶ Yet, perhaps because he is rather difficult to read—his writings mix very detailed ethnography with a structuralist perspective and some psychoanalytical interpretations—it is striking to see that Archaimbault has never been very influential locally, although the aim of his work was precisely to contribute to the project of constructing a national and essentially Lao culture. This may have been because he chose to work in places that were not central to the social construction of the Lao national, Xieng Khouang and Champassak.

It must be kept in mind that 'the invention of a national culture' is not a continuous process that relies on a gradually collated corpus of knowledge. This invention has contradictory moments, and it is usually political power that decides on the selection of the emblematic items it wants to use. This is particularly acute in Laos where there are few local researchers and, for the most part, they are poorly informed about international research and have a very limited capacity for critical intervention regarding state policy formation. Although there are other actors, the State is principally responsible for the 'presentation' of what must be the national culture. In this regard, some fundamental research projects currently being conducted in the field of culture in Laos are not considered very helpful by the State in the presentation of its meta-narrative regarding Lao culture. Sometimes, they may even be considered quite disturbing.

¹⁴ See, for instance, Evans (1998; 1999); Pholsena (2006).

¹⁵ See Finot (1917); Parmentier (1954); Evans (1999).

¹⁶ See, for instance, Archaimbault (1967, 1971a, 1971b, 1973).

Some scholars have regretted that the Lao authorities have shown little interest in the work on manuscripts or archaic inscriptions, principally led by international experts.¹⁷ Even if these studies concern an ancient Lao cultural heritage, the fact is that they can hardly be staged to a wide audience. Moreover, they often show evidence of external influences—from Lanna, Khmer or even Môn cultures—and for this reason they are of little use in the context of national ideology. This is less true of some famous archaeological sites such as Vat Phou or the Plain of Jars. Even if these two sites cannot really be linked to Lao culture itself—as one is proto-Khmer and the origin of the other remains obscure and controversial—spectacular ‘presentations’ are organized by the State and the provinces, such as the Vat Phou festival in Champassak, which is attended by thousands of participants every year.¹⁸

The State and Discourses on Multi-Cultural Heritage

It is, in fact, in its relationship to ‘Lao history’ that the State shows a particular capacity for innovations. Martin Stuart-Fox, Grant Evans, Vatthana Pholsena, Oliver Tappe and Volker Grabowsky have already shown how the Lao PDR both indulged itself with the reputation of being a protector of Buddhism by reinstating certain ceremonies and fabricated a historical legitimacy by appearing to follow in the footsteps of the great defender kings of the nation, whose statues are now located in the four corners of Vientiane.¹⁹

One of the latest inventions that is highly visible in Vientiane is the *Lak Muang* city pillar of the capital, also called the *Ho Lak Muang*, city pillar sanctuary. Located near the Vat Si Muang, it was officially opened in October 2012 and consecrated during an impressive ceremony, which was led by dozens of monks and attended by a huge audience.²⁰ However, for the population of Vientiane, the nearby Vat Si Muang has housed the town’s Lak Muang since the time of King Setthathirath, in the 16th century. Vat Si Muang is known to be a special, popular shrine, and this has been reinforced by the legend concerning its origin, when a pregnant woman was said to have been sacrificed and placed at the base of the stone post that became the central pillar of the city. Why then are the State authorities building the new ‘Ho Lak Muang’?

With this monument, the State seeks to somehow regain symbolic control of the former ‘Muang’ city pillar, a symbolically important space. It is not pretending to replace the Lak Muang, which is still located in the Vat Si Muang. Instead, the monument is presented as a sanctuary and a museum that contains relics of the ancient history of Laos. “It must be a vital cultural reference for future generations,” stated the Minister of Information and Culture during its inauguration.²¹

Its construction was decreed on the occasion of the 450th anniversary of the city of Vientiane, and it houses hundreds of different stones extracted from archaeological excavations. Some come from the ancient wall of Vientiane, which was constructed in the 16th century, but others are from proto-historic sites around the

¹⁷ Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient (1999). Still, some projects in this field have been successfully developed, like the German led ‘Preservation of Lao Manuscripts Program’ that could thrive in cooperation with the National Library over a 10-year period (1994–2004).

¹⁸ Global Heritage Fund. Wat Phu.

http://www.globalheritagefund.org/news/publications/ghr_2011_vol1.html, Global Heritage Review 2011, ‘Champassak prépare la fête du Vat Phou’, *Le Rénovateur*, 4 février 2013.

¹⁹ See Stuart-Fox (1996); Evans (1998); Pholsena (2006); Tappe, (2012); Grabowsky (2011).

²⁰ ‘Inauguration du pavillon-musée du pilier de la ville à la mi-novembre’, *Le Rénovateur*, 8 octobre 2012.

²¹ ‘Fin des travaux du Musée du pilier de Vientiane’ *Le Rénovateur*, 15 octobre 2012.

city.²² In any event, the State is willing to establish its current patronage on the city's Lak Muang, as well as its place in history, with the support of ancient and indisputable emblems—far more ancient than those in Vat Si Muang. The State is responsible for this 'cultural innovation,' but through the selection of archaeological evidence, is attempting to show that it also relies on scientific expertise.

In addition, it was widely rumored that the monument had been largely financed by private funds, suggesting that the entire Lao society had supported this project. In fact, it turns out that the funds provided by the State were supplemented primarily by large national companies and some foreign firms. And now, a few months after its inauguration, popular fervor is still concentrated at Vat Si Muang, while the new Ho Lak Muang seems deserted.

This example allows us to see the three primary types of actors involved in the invention of the national culture. First, the State, which is usually the main player or actor in Laos today. By 'the State,' I mean the government that embodies it and the *ad hoc* committees of officials and party members at the central level and in the provinces and districts. The second type of actor is the 'expert' who represents a very broad and varied category—including national and international researchers and consultants, as well as some NGOs or associations whose work or discourse can be exploited but who also have the ability to intervene, often through contacts outside the country, and especially via international networks and the media. Finally, a third crucial actor is the 'Lao people' or 'Lao society' in the broad sense, whose 'agency'—the capacity to propose, react or resist—is obviously not the same in large cities like Vientiane or Pakse as it is in remote village districts.²³ Society also makes choices among proposals. In Vientiane, we can see that the That Luang festival is growing more every year and is attended by hundreds of thousands of people. In the same way, observers have been surprised by the rapid nationalist and popular devotion expressed about the rather recent statue of Chao Anou in Vientiane, with constant offerings of flowers, while at the same time other royal statues or famous presidential busts are virtually ignored.²⁴

The role of models should also be emphasized in order to understand the sources of official cultural innovation in Laos. Regarding the new Ho Lak Muang in Vientiane, one is struck by the similarity of the building with comparable monuments found in Thai cities. As Vientiane is the capital, one would assume the San Lak Muang in Bangkok as a possible source of inspiration. But even closer, one can see that several major cities in Isan have built—long before Vientiane—a monument similar to Lak Muang. In this fabrication of a Lao culture, it is particularly important to note all the new exchanges of cultural symbols now developing between the two banks of the Mekong.

²² More than a dozen of articles in the Lao newspapers as well as in the *Vientiane Times* or the *Rénovateur* were devoted in 2012 to the 450th anniversary of Vientiane and to these archaeological findings.

²³ Social control in Laos is generally stronger in villages than in cities, tending to prevent strong local reaction from rural populations. The same may not be true elsewhere in the region, notably in Cambodia or Thailand, where rural associations or local NGOs can efficiently support the diffusion of villagers' claims.

²⁴ Tappe (2012). On Lao nationalism, see also Creak (2011).

A Multi-Ethnic National Culture Underlined by a Majority Culture

The creation of a multi-ethnic national culture is heavily determined by the fabrication of this so-called 'majority culture.' In contrast to this Lao cultural domination, we refer to 'non-Lao-Tai' groups as 'minorities' or 'ethnic minorities' here, for it is always and above all a political reality in the context of the Lao nation state, even if this designation is debatable from an anthropological point of view.²⁵

Since 1975, the issue of the management of ethnic diversity has been officially addressed, beginning at the point when the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, the Pathet Lao, came to power with the help of the Vietnamese army, and established a communist-type regime. Under the previous Royal Lao Government (RLG), there had been a committee of inter-ethnic relations, but the division of the country by almost thirty years of war moved this concern into the realm of military matters, with each side trying to get the support of minorities who occupied mountainous positions that were considered to be strategically important.

After 1975, it was a question of reuniting the country and making its polyethnicity viable. The formulation of the ethnic question in Laos is based, with some variations, on the Vietnamese model, which was dependent on the Soviet and Chinese experience. Two major issues came to the fore: first, whether or not to grant a form of autonomy to certain regions on the basis of ethnic criteria; and second, a positivist concern, representative of a way of socialist scientism regarding the designation and classification of ethnic groups.²⁶

However, the government of Kaysone Phomvihane, Secretary General of the Pathet Lao, made it clear upon taking power that he would make the unity of the country a priority. He promised that every minority could retain its 'ancestral customs' and that the Party would ensure that all ethnic groups were treated equally. But unlike the early revolutionary positions of the Chinese or Vietnamese, he refused any recognition of nationality or regional autonomy, and defended a polyethnic solidarity in the context of a single and indissoluble Lao nation.²⁷

Instead, national unity was proposed, supported by a national culture, the latter being modelled on the Lao-Tai cultural norms (Trankell 1998). This, Kaysone recognized, was only partly because the Lao-Tai formed a majority, but was mostly because they had the highest level of 'cultural development.' "The Lao culture," he said during a speech in 1981 specifically devoted to the ethnic problem, "must be the basic culture shared by all ethnic groups, and it must be a culture that will facilitate exchanges between different groups. The Lao language, written and spoken, must be the common language of the nation and Lao script (the only one accepted) the link between all ethnic groups" (Evans 1999).

But it is not just ethnicity or history that defines the minority status of a group (or defines who are 'indigenous peoples') but also its economic and social condition. However, in the 1990s, when Laos began to develop, all indicators showed that the economic and social gap was widening between lowlanders and highlander minorities (Pholsena 2005). Recognizing this, the Lao government has tried to include ethnic minorities in national development. It was initially a case of economic integration: while wanting to drastically reduce the practice of shifting cultivation, they also tried to move the villagers from a subsistence economy to a market

²⁵ In this regard, some non-Buddhist Tai groups can be seen also as "ethnic minorities."

²⁶ Goudineau (2000). On the politics of ethnic classification in Vietnam, see Masako (2013).

²⁷ See "Ethnic Affairs" in Stuart-Fox (1986: 130–136).

economy. It was also a project of territorial and social integration: they wanted to reduce the isolation of some villages and give them access to services (health, education, etc.), and they thought they could achieve this through the displacement and relocation of villages to the plains.

It was finally decided to concentrate on cultural integration, with the promotion of a national culture. As I mentioned earlier, it was first a question of promoting the common language, Lao, which was poorly spoken by many mountain peoples (the use of minority languages in education is not allowed by the Ministry of Education) and then, encouraging the creation of a national or regional ethnic folklore (e.g., dancing, singing and crafts). At the same time, many specific cultural practices, essential identity markers for certain ethnic minorities, were openly disparaged, to the point where some villagers gave them up of their own accord; this included religious practices (such as domestic animal sacrifices) or material culture (such as architecture and statues).

Recent Changes in Multi-Ethnicity Discourse

The discourse on multi-ethnicity has not fundamentally changed, but its form has evolved over recent years in Laos. Never before has so much importance been officially given to the cultural heritage of minority groups. Local officials are required to 'present' their local traditions. In addition, increasing numbers of villagers are mobilized to show their own 'ethnic characteristics' in new festivals or on new 'stages,' and foreign experts—who were mistrusted before—are now invited to provide their knowledge of specific groups or to participate in the creation of museums in the provinces.²⁸

All the actors I mentioned above—mainly the Lao government, its local officials, the experts and populations involved—are invited to participate in the 'presentation' of the fine traditions of different ethnic minority groups. There is a strong demand for innovation, but in this undertaking, two kinds of paradox emerge.

The first is that the official will to display 'ethnic traditions' is taking place while the livelihoods of many minorities have been suddenly and drastically transformed. The second paradox is that the cultures of different ethnic groups are always presented as a kind of juxtaposition, as if they existed side-by-side—as seen on certain Lao banknotes. However, the reality corresponds less and less to this image due to the territorial reorganization that increases the regrouping of villages and results in completely new situations of inter-ethnic relations everywhere.

It must therefore be recognized that the former basis for the cultural practices of many minorities has largely disappeared. In the past, distinct village cultures could be observed between one group and another, but this has largely been erased over the past fifteen years, in terms of architecture and religious and social organization. Without going into detail, province by province, there is now a standardization in types of habitat, with an incentive to build Lao-type houses. One can also see a reduction in collective rituals in non-Buddhist villages, notably a decline in sacrificial rituals and shamanism.²⁹ The promotion of the nuclear family as the norm has significantly reduced the multiplicity of forms of social organization that existed in

²⁸ See, for instance, *Posters on Ethnic Groups* (2012), within the permanent exhibition of the Phongsaly provincial museum, by Grégoire Schlemmer (IRD) and Karine Pin (GIZ); see also some private initiatives allowed by the government, such as the Traditional Arts and Ethnology Center (TAEC) in Luang Phrabang.

²⁹ See Sprenger (2006; 2009); Bouté (2011).

the past. This has resulted in the disappearance, in both the north and south, of the longhouses that sheltered extended families or lineages.

In brief, the official exhibition of ethnic diversity is taking place, paradoxically, against a background of accelerated standardization of social and cultural diversity. Of course, in recent years, Lao society as a whole has rapidly evolved as a result of modernization and the growth fuelled by foreign investment. The Lao-Tai groups also experienced significant economic and social change (see Rehbein 2011), but they have not seen their livelihoods and their cultural or religious practices disrupted to the same extent as other groups. Above all, they were not subjected to the same development and resettlement policies that have been implemented for 'ethnic minority' villages, especially in upland areas, which account for about two-thirds of the territory of Laos.

Resettlements and Induced Changes among Inter-Ethnic Groups

Ironically, after surviving the vicissitudes of history for centuries, including contemporary wars, many ethnic groups in Laos now appear to be in an extremely precarious situation, at a time when the country is opening up to faster economic development. In addition, the mountain areas, which are the most familiar places for many of them, are increasingly becoming an important factor in development, as it is here that the two main sources of the country's wealth are located: forests and hydroelectric power. The construction of large dams and the protection of forests, or the control of their exploitation, regularly led to conflicts with ethnic minorities over the occupation of space, especially for those still practicing shifting cultivation in the uplands. Since the beginning of the 1990s, a solution has been adopted that calls for the permanent resettlement of mountain minorities in the plains, or close to main roads, recalling both some former migration dynamics and the forced displacement that occurred during the war years (cf. Barber 1979; Taillard 1989).

The Minister of Justice, quoted earlier, acknowledged that, "the relocation policy could affect the traditional livelihoods," but it was nevertheless, "a crucial component of the poverty reduction programmes." Unfortunately, since 1997, and the publication of the collective report I led and edited (see *supra*) (Cf. Goudineau 1997), there has been no new and systematic national survey on the social and cultural impact of the resettlements of displaced villages. Still, many studies have largely confirmed the findings and concerns of this first report, notably studies on some district resettlements or provincial internal migrations by Olivier Évrard, Steve Daviau, Ian Baird and Bruce Shoemaker, and Peter Vandergeest.³⁰ At that time, my aim, with the help of my team, had been to document the significant wave of relocations that had occurred in the mid-1990s from mountain villages into valleys. Although it was a vast project, it seemed to be poorly organized and did not correspond to any 'resettlement policy' recognized so far by the government. The only ideological justification was a comprehensive sedentarization of the upland communities through the establishment of so-called permanent occupations (*axip khong thi* in Lao).

However, the initial silence at the publication of the report was later followed by the explicit creation of several plans for the reorganization of mountain territories.

³⁰ See, after 1997, some localized reports or summarized papers on this issue: Goudineau (2000); Goudineau and Évrard (2004); Vandergeest (2003); Baird and Shoemaker (2007).

First, there were ‘focal sites’ measures (*Khet choutsoum phatthana* in Lao), and then ‘village consolidation’ and ‘development of village clusters’ plans (*Khum phatthana* and *Khum ban phatthana* in Lao). All these village relocation measures were, in principle, dictated by poverty reduction plans as well as by rural development policy. Resettlement had several objectives, mainly concerning increasing access to public education and healthcare facilities, but also aimed at shifting and stabilizing cultivation—and opium eradication in the northern part of the country. Similar relocation measures were also used to move massive numbers of villages in the name of larger provincial or national projects. This is currently the case, for example, in Saravan with road infrastructure projects in Ta Oi District and extensive planting projects in other districts. It is also happening in Xekong Province, where mining and especially the planned Xekong 4 Dam are making it necessary for the Kaleum District town to be moved even now.

Overall, these resettlement and relocation measures have completely reorganized the map of villages in a large part of the country. It is not possible to obtain exact figures, but we can estimate that in many mountainous districts, more than 70 percent of the population has been relocated over the last 15 years, to which must be added the many families who chose to move elsewhere in anticipation of their planned relocation into village clusters. These movements and regroupings of villages have resulted in complicated and sometimes conflicting neighborhood situations, and have created new configurations of inter-ethnic relations in all provinces. To guide the organization of these new ‘village clusters,’ a large number of civil servants were specifically assigned in the districts. It is therefore a true example of ‘social engineering’ that was deployed by the Lao government, in the name of economic development for ethnic minorities. This time, the model behind these initiatives is quite clearly a Vietnamese model. Vietnam offers assistance to the Lao PDR through their considerable expertise in the integration of ethnic minorities, particularly in the field of education, with college funding in several provinces reserved for children from families of mountain minorities.

From Ethnic Minorities to Cultural Villages

A Vietnamese model is also the basis for one of the government innovations in the field of social engineering, dealing directly with the issue of a national multi-ethnic culture: that is the ‘cultural villages’ (*ban vatthanatham* in Lao). This measure has existed since 1994 and, in principle, covers all ethnic groups, including the Lao-Tai, but it has mainly been in the past five years that the State has strongly encouraged the creation of these villages and has particularly targeted districts of mountainous provinces where many ethnic minorities have been displaced and relocated.

The Ministry of Culture, which is also the Ministry of Information and Tourism, stated in 2011 that there were more than 300,000 families and more than 1,500 villages that had received the title of ‘models of culture.’ The minister announced a target for the period 2012–2014 of naming more than 160 villages and over 30 cluster towns ‘models of culture,’ and he stated that this should affect more than 120,000 families.³¹ Following these instructions, the Xekong provincial government, which has

³¹ *Vientiane Times*, November 9, 2011.

completed the creation of 18 ‘cultural villages’ since 2009, plans to create 24 new villages by 2014.³²

A brochure was published in 2009 that defines the rules that have to be respected in order to be named a ‘cultural village’ by district and provincial officials (Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism 2009). It first states that the village does not become ‘cultural’ unless at least 70 percent of the families in the village can be considered ‘cultural families’ (*khop khoua vatthanatham* in Lao). To do so, families must comply with the ‘five rules,’ which are that: they respect the law and the instructions of the village committee; they live in a settled home; they have stable resources; their children must go to school; and that they ‘have to reject irrational beliefs’ (*tong loplang kan seua theu ngom ngoua sin seung* in Lao).³³ The village itself must meet five conditions and follow five steps to be promoted to a ‘cultural village.’ Alongside the standards of cleanliness and education, and criteria for well-planned economic development, civic and political conditions are also stipulated, especially the strong leadership of the Party and the ability to provide accurate statistics on the village. Rules to promote and consolidate a proper ‘village heritage’ are also issued. Among these rules: the village must undertake the eradication of irrational beliefs; it must set up ‘an information room’ (*ho khao* in Lao) with posters in which the story of the ‘liberation’ of the country is recounted and the good customs of the community as passed down by the elders are promoted; it should also, if possible, have an artistic action group deciding, among other things, the costumes and traditional dances of the community.

The criteria for attaining model cultural village status relate to the fulfilment of a wide variety of conditions: employment, healthcare, access to education, family unity, legal livelihood, political awareness and community solidarity. But the importance of the cultural transmission of the “good and beautiful traditions” of the community to the family and the village is also stressed, with the capacity to provide visitors with a self-presentation of the genuine culture of the group. The cultural villages are key intermediaries of the State for the normalization and standardization of cultural events across the country.

Many collective rituals are thus abandoned in these model villages and are replaced by village festivals inspired by Lao culture. This is particularly the case for the New Year, where alongside Phimai Lao or the Hmong New Year, each ethnic group is encouraged to organize its own equivalent New Year festival to replace various ancient rituals. Hence, there is ‘Boun Greh’ for the Khmu, or ‘Boun Vel’ (literally ‘village festival’ in a mix of Lao and Katuic language) for the Kantu/Katu and the Ngé (Ngkriang), but buffalo sacrifices that were previously at the heart of rituals are banned.³⁴

Model villages are to be an example to other surrounding villages, but they do more than that: they establish new standards that will be disseminated within the ethnic group to which they belong as ‘true’ tradition. Fifteen years ago, no Kantu/Katu or Ngé could say what a ‘Boun Vel’ was, and many Khmu did not practice ‘Boun Greh,’ but today people who are not aware of them are regarded as not knowing ‘their’

³² *Le Rénovateur*, April 2, 2012.

³³ See also the Governor of Xekong province’s statement, according to which one of the obstacles to the development of the province is the continuing influence of ancient beliefs on uneducated populations (*Le Rénovateur*, April 2, 2012).

³⁴ On Boun Greh, see Petit (2013). Katu and Ngé (Ngkriang) examples are from my own observations on the field.

traditions. In today's Laos, the 'cultural villages' are definitely at the heart of the reinvention of tradition, and villagers belonging to them are involved in the staging of multi-ethnic culture that takes place in the provinces for tourists or during major national festivals.

Representations of the multi-ethnic Lao are organized and 'folklorized' by committees of civil servants from the Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism, from the central level to the districts. For a long time, these civil servants have chiefly organized singing and dancing competitions between ethnic groups at the local level. They were also largely responsible for the creation of texts and choreographies that were supposed to be representative of a particular group. On television, or when entertaining foreign VIPs, it was often the dancers from the National School who were performing these so-called ethnic dances, whatever their ethnicity. However—as in the field of Lao culture—in recent years the State has dramatically increased 'multi-ethnic' cultural innovations, and it relies primarily on members of artistic committees in cultural villages.

These innovations have become necessary as it has become clear that the competitions or performances of songs and dances bored both local people and tourists, especially tourists from neighbouring countries, particularly the Thai and Chinese, who all have similar 'ethnic' entertainment. Now, new presentations of multi-ethnicity can be seen everywhere in Laos, especially during major festivals; for example, at the That Luang parade, the Vat Phou festival or at the Elephant festival in Xayaboury, which also became "The festival of the eight ethnic groups" in 2013: Lao, Tai Dam, Lue, Hmong, Khmu, Phrai, Nyuan and Lu Mien.³⁵



Figure 1: Image of Xekong Post (photo: Y. Goudineau)

In these multi-ethnic presentations, each group must appear perfectly unique, and there has been an escalation in the 'folklorization' and exoticism of the supposed ethnic traditions to reinforce this distinctiveness. In the Vat Phou festival, southern minorities are each presented wearing different ethnic clothes or headdresses, some of which are highly improbable and have attributes that are more or less warrior-like, depending on the group. The Ta Oi, Katu, Alak and Ngé are therefore highly differentiated, whereas, as I have mentioned, they are in a kind of cultural continuum, making this dissimilarity of clothing or anything else a product of pure fantasy. However, the reality was that their villages had quite different characteristics in terms of social organization—that was their real difference—and these differences have largely been erased due to the village relocations.

³⁵ *Le Rénovateur*, February 18, 2013.

The Lak Muang of Xekong (cf. Figure 1) is an impressive illustration of the positioning of national multi-ethnic culture under the guidance of the Lao culture, which is especially impressive in a province historically devoted to Austro-Asiatic minorities where ethnic Lao account for less than 2 percent of the population.

The bizarre monument installed at the town entrance is called the '*Xouan Lak Muang Xekong*'—the garden of the Lak Muang of Xekong. At the end of the garden is the new central pillar of Xekong, and all the ethnic groups are lined up on each side—as if they are a guard of honour at the Lak Muang, and as a sign of respect and submission. Each group is represented by a couple, who have distinctive differences in their costumes and, for some, warrior-like accessories. On the sides, assorted sculptures are intended to depict the specific ways of life of the different ethnic groups.



Figures 2 and 3: Line of ethnic groups and a couple, in this case the Talieng (Triang) (photo: Y. Goudineau)

A small booklet has been published by the provincial government to explain the significance of the monument.³⁶ It says that the Lak Muang is the center of the city and the territory, and that it unites all ethnic groups and that at the same time it is a concentration of all the sacrificial posts that can be found in the villages. As such, it is more powerful than all the posts put together. The implication seems to be that it protects all the villagers who no longer need to practice sacrifices and bad customs. The three circles at the top of the Lak Muang represent the *Tripitaka*, while the three baskets (Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha), and the three stripes at the base represent weaving, which is one of the good customs of ethnic groups. The new Lak Muang, like the one in Vientiane, was consecrated by monks at its inauguration.

Conclusions

If the State appears to be primarily responsible for this invention of a multi-ethnic national culture, we must nevertheless consider whether alternatives to its initiatives exist, and what means of expression they may have in Lao PDR. There are

³⁶ *Xouan Lak Muang, khweng Xekong*, 2012. I thank Vathana Pholsena for passing it on to me.

two issues we have to address in this regard: what is the margin of agency or self-presentation of the ethnic groups themselves, and what role can experts play, especially those of us who are here today, even if we represent very different approaches?

Regarding the ethnic groups themselves, they certainly do not all have the same capacity for self-presentation. Some groups have the means to offer alternative discourses to the presentation of their culture initiated by the State, while others do not. For a long time, the populations of a few thousand people among whom I worked in Saravan or Xekong had no specific discourse as to what their tradition as an ethnic group would be. Their culture essentially remains a 'village culture.' They can explain what has changed in recent years; they can approve it or bitterly regret it. Some villages or families may try to refuse certain changes in their livelihood, or even decide to continue to practice 'bad customs' such as sacrificial rituals. Some may therefore operate locally and have some agency, but it is very limited.

They do not have a 'set' of standards or values to hold up against those of 'cultural villages'—especially since their only links to the outside are relatives in the army or in local government, who are therefore part of the State apparatus and generally defend the official line of thought. Moreover, many of the villages in which I worked in the 1990s did not have a sense of 'ethnic' community. People were first and foremost from a particular village. 'We were taught that we were Katu,' some villagers told me with amazement, who thought that the Katu were people living in Vietnam. Given these conditions, until recently, the villagers had no clear discourse of the self-presentation of their supposed ethnic group.

In contrast, if one considers the Hmong, the picture is completely different. I am not an expert on Hmong culture, and there are many with greater knowledge on this subject, but it is clear that the ability of self-presentation and discourse as an alternative to the presentation of the Lao government on Hmong culture is almost limitless. The Hmong are a large ethnic group in Laos that has the political means to negotiate, even to be controversial. In addition, they have powerful communication links abroad, in the media and in academic circles. They can therefore challenge, at least to some degree, the Lao State discourse with strong addresses regarding their community values, and they have many experts to produce articulate speeches about their culture. The two cases serve to demonstrate that groups have more room to negotiate with the State about the presentation or invention of their culture if they are less remote and involved in cross-border relationships, or are linked to diasporas.

But what about the experts who are also involved in the invention of multi-ethnic culture through their work? What use that can be made of them? Again, the range of experts is wide, even if some Christian organizations or indigenous NGOs, very instrumental elsewhere in the making of cultural communities, are not allowed to work in Lao PDR, or are under strict control. Still—generally speaking—the experts are divided between the two sides, or two aspects of multi-ethnicity: those interested in ethnic diversity as cultural multiplicity, and those who are mainly concerned with the actual management of inter-ethnicity in Laos, and its social and economic effects.

These are the two main approaches among researchers. On the one hand, an approach that can be called 'culturalist': an approach that seeks to highlight the cultural specificities of particular ethnic groups, either by studying certain musical, literary or artistic traditions, or by asking what it means to be Khmu, Hmong, Pacoh, etc., sometimes at the risk of essentializing ethnic cultures. There is another approach, which could be called 'localist,' which focuses on 'situations' and their history. It

includes, for example, analyzing how certain projects, policies or territorial dynamics affect populations, and therefore have consequences on ethnicity and inter-ethnicity. These two approaches can, moreover, be complementary, as both sides of the multi-ethnicity interact with each other. The State presentation of multi-ethnic culture tends to favor, but only to a certain extent, the culturalist approach, and to be wary of localist approaches.

Things are currently changing, as many provinces or districts wish to assert their identities and want to exhibit local multi-ethnic cultures that could be identified as their own. Here, we are dealing with a kind of 'localist' perspective from different provinces that is often linked to the building of new museums, or the renovation of old ones. The idea is usually to illustrate the culture and the history of the province as a whole. Foreign experts are increasingly invited to participate in this staging. Sometimes they successfully enlarge the perspective and add information on the cultural history of the minorities and local inter-ethnic relationships. But the question of who these local museums are actually intended for remains. Tourists? Local civil servants? Schoolchildren? And an even more crucial issue is whether the villagers themselves will be able to take them over at one point—either to criticize them if they do not think they relate to them in an appropriate way—or on the contrary, to find elements of their past history there—elements of memory for themselves.

In 1995, when the village of Kandon, today a preeminent 'cultural village' in Xekong, moved from Kaleum District to a new location three days away on foot, I followed the villagers to their new site. I then came back a little later to distribute photos of the move and of their old village. They immediately posted these pictures at the entrance to the new site. They were strongly reprimanded for this by the local officials from the Department of Culture, who maintained that it was not good to cultivate a 'negative nostalgia' that would be anti-progressive in the new village. To this day, the villagers have to hide the pictures I gave them.

Today, these same authorities from the Department of Information, Culture and Tourism are asking me to give them the photos for the New Provincial Museum in Xekong. For the time being, I have not refused, but I have not received any answer to my only question: For what?

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An Ethnohistory of Highland Societies in Northern Laos

Vanina Bouté¹

Relations between ethnic minorities and states of continental Southeast Asia — or kingdoms in the pre-colonial period—have generally been approached by researchers from two angles: absorption, and thus disappearance, the ‘minorities’ somehow ‘melting’ into the mass of larger populations, or resistance, a theme which has been more popular. Recently, James Scott, a political scientist, took up this theme of resistance once again in his book with the revealing title, *The Art of Not Being Governed. An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (2009). Assuming that there is a general dynamic that could characterize the relationship between Highlanders and Lowlanders, Scott portrays it as necessarily antagonistic: the mountain peoples of the Southeast Asian highlands would be societies that are not only ‘against the state’ (Clastres 1974) but would demonstrate throughout history that they always wanted to ‘flee the state’ and have evolved accordingly (in an area stretching from Assam to Vietnam).

The theoretical position defended here, one that I have upheld since my thesis in 2005, is that rather than embodying a radical ‘Otherness’ to lowland societies, many of the so-called hill societies acted as ‘internal margins.’ They continued to trade with the lowland societies or maintained political relations in a symbiotic form that often led to integration. Far from being an isolated case in history, the ‘mirror of power’ positioning of the Phounoy² is an option that has been chosen by many so-called ‘minorities,’ and this enables us to understand the growth of small kingdoms or local principalities over time, such as the Tai *muang*. But anthropologists have preferred to focus on societies that they believe resisted any form of integration and historians, with a few exceptions (notably Archaimbault 1961, 1991; Grabowsky and Wichasin 2008) have spent little time examining local sources to understand in detail the process of development of some of these ‘centers’ through the progressive absorption of their internal margins.

In this article, I therefore intend to reconsider the case of the Phounoy and their relationship to the dominant powers through the history of their settlement in what is now the province of Phongsaly in northern Laos and their progressive distinction, via the kingdom of Luang Phrabang during the 18th and 19th centuries, as guardians of the borders. From the example of this Tibeto-Burman language group of approximately 40,000 people (Steering Committee for Census 2006), I will outline the procedures for the ethnogenesis of a population by the way it has integrated into the regional kingdoms and then into colonial and postcolonial Laos. By looking at the history, I will show the process by which the Phongsaly region — the most northern province of Laos, bordering on China and Vietnam — has gradually been attached to the kingdom of Luang Phrabang and the specific place that the Phounoy have occupied there. I will also show how this process of regionalization has gradually led to a

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² See my book *En miroir du pouvoir. Les Phounoy du Nord Laos. Ethnogenèse et dynamiques d'intégration*, Paris: Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient, 2011.

transformation of the political and social systems of the Phounoy group modeled after the Tai *muang*.³

The Phounoy group drew my attention because of two factors that led me to look into its past in order to understand its origins: its name and location, and its apparent ‘laocization.’ Like many other ethnic groups in the country, those who call themselves ‘Phounoy’ are found only in Laos itself. Speakers of an often very similar language in neighboring countries have different names (such as the Bisou in Thailand, the Coong in Vietnam, the Pyen in Burma and the Sangkong in China⁴). With the exception of the Bisou,⁵ all these group names are exonyms, that is, they are either Tai, Shan, Vietnamese or Chinese terms, originating from the language of the majority population in the region where each group is located. Furthermore, the Phounoy were not just located only in Laos, but were originally confined to a relatively limited territory there, “a square twenty miles long” (Roux 1924: 448), which is the mountainous center of Phongsaly Province. The second intriguing fact is that compared to other Tibeto-Burman language populations⁶ known by amateur photographers to be highly colorful, the Phounoy are, on the contrary, primarily characterized by the absence of any outward signs of identity: they have no special costumes, they have houses on stilts similar to those of the Tai Lue, and the first thing they told me was that they were and behaved “just like Lao people.” They are one of the few minorities in the country that adopted Buddhism long ago, and the first French colonial texts describe this population as having a system of political organization very similar to that of the Lao and Tai *muang*.⁷

It is therefore difficult to understand the distinctive characteristics of this population, which has a name of Tai origin, along with many specific features typical of Tai groups, and which is in a region, Phongsaly, that is far from the centers of power and where the Tai Lue and Lao represent respectively just 3% and 4.7% of the total population. I will trace this process by distinguishing two main periods: the first half of the 18th century, during which Phounoy language groups settled in the area and were given the role of guarding the borders of a territory assigned to them by the king of Luang Phrabang, followed by the 19th century, when the influence of Luang Phrabang on these mountain groups was reinforced through various edicts that also gave them a form of authority over neighboring populations.

To trace the history of the Phounoy group,⁸ I relied primarily on oral narratives, collected from the oldest Phounoy in thirty villages in the province of

³ The *muang* is a basic territorial and political unit of Tai populations that can be translated as ‘principality,’ ‘seigneurie,’ “Chief’s jurisdiction,” and can designate both the territory and its center [the town, the village]. For a definition of the *muang*, see J.F. Papet’s article, 1997.

⁴ There are no ethnographic studies of any of these groups. Only linguistic studies have been carried out among these peoples, placing their languages in the ‘Bisoïd’ family of the southern branch of Loloish languages—see notably Matisoff (1972).

⁵ According to Baudouin, *Bi* means ‘person’ in Bisou (1991: 20).

⁶ The Akha, Hani, Lolo, and Sila populations represent about 30% of the total population of Phongsaly province. If we include the Phounoy, the Tibeto-Burman language speakers make up 50% of the total population of the province.

⁷ The types of political organization of Tai language populations (the Lao, Tai Lue, Tai Phouan, etc.) in pre-colonial times are characterized by a pyramidal hierarchy of which the *muang* is the base. With regard to Tai political systems, see, among others, Condominas (1980) and Tambiah (1976). From now on, I will use the term ‘Tai’ in a global way: i.e., I will refer to both the Lao and the Tai Lue in this context.

⁸ I note here that in this article I will only deal with those who call themselves Phounoy. In the province of Phongsaly, there are actually some small groups (1 or 2 villages) who speak a language similar to Phounoy,

Phongsaly during different periods (two years between 1999 and 2001, several months in 2002, 2005 and 2007, until the present day⁹). These narratives were compared with those collected in the 1960s by the linguist M. Ferlus (1969; 1971), with documents of the French colonial administration and with different versions of the Royal Chronicles of Luang Phrabang. Finally, I was fortunate enough to discover documents in Phounoy villages that had been sent by the king of Luang Phrabang to local leaders — some *Kongdin* and various royal orders — that were later photographed and transcribed by members of the EFEO Vientiane¹⁰ and by Grégoire Schlemmer. In 2012, I was able to have these documents translated from Tham Lue to Lao by Mr. Khampeng Kettavong, so I could accurately trace them back to the first half of the 18th century. Much of the data in this article has been presented elsewhere (see Bouté 2011 in particular); however, the information provided by the *Kongdin* has not been published previously.

I. The emergence of the Phounoy and their progressive integration on the borders of the kingdom of Luang Phrabang

Since Phongsaly Province seems to be the main settlement of the Phounoy, a brief overview of the history of this area is required in order to understand the history of the group. Between the 18th century (our sources do not go back any further) and the end of the 19th century, this region was gradually integrated into the kingdom of Luang Phrabang through the allocation of positions and political titles to certain leaders of the local population. By retracing the main steps taken by the king in the region, we will see how some Tibeto-Burmese speaking groups (not yet called “Phounoy”) gradually became an ethnic entity through their establishment and distinction by the King.

The arrival of the Phounoy in the region during the first half of the 18th century

Even though it is difficult to date the arrival of the Phounoy to the region (usually, scholars date the settlement of other Tibeto-Burman speaking groups in the north of the Indochinese peninsula to the early 19th century¹¹), thanks to the *Kongdin* documents, the arrival of the Phounoy can be traced back to at least around 1750, the date of the earliest found ancient document. This roughly corroborates stories of Phounoy that date their arrival in the area of Phongsaly between the beginning and the first half of the 18th century. Several facts seem to confirm that date. Most of the

but who call themselves by different names (the Tchaho, Phongkou, Laopan, Tang, Phoumon and Laoseng). An article on these populations, written by the anthropologist G. Schlemmer is currently being prepared. For further clarity, I do not refer to a much smaller Phounoy group that has recently settled on the left bank of the Ou River, and has developed in a slightly different way politically (for these developments, see my article, Bouté 2007).

⁹ Investigations were also carried out in the lowlands of the province among the Tai Lue, due to the Lue’s former political importance in the region and because of their influence on the Phounoy, notably through Buddhism.

¹⁰ The documents were held by three people in the village of Thongpi where I lived for seven months in 2000. An old woman had two *Kongdin* (one dated 1750, the other 1774), Royal Decrees of 1860 and 1868, and various fragments of different texts (promotion of local dignitaries, magic formulas, etc.; another woman had a *Kongdin* dated 1750 and a Royal Decree from 1860; an old man had a *Kongdin* dated 1774, and several Royal Decrees from 1844, 1860, 1864, 1865 and 1880; outside of these, some documents could not be dated.

¹¹ Stuart-Fox 1997: 16; Alting von Geusau 2000: 126, 130; Badenoch 2013.

Phounoy elders trace their arrival back seven or eight generations (one generation for them corresponds to 30 years, half the age of a man eligible to become an elder); also, the inhabitants of Samlang, considered the oldest Phounoy village, maintained that it is a little more than three hundred years old.

It is important to note that at that time there was no ethnic group called “Phounoy”; they were instead various village groups speaking closely related Tibeto-Burmese languages. As we will see below, these village groups will only later be identified as “Phounoy” (but for the sake of clarity, I will call them “Phounoy” from now on).

The various stories collected from Phounoy elders tell us that they once lived under Burmese rule. Two main migratory routes are mentioned: one brought the Phounoy directly from Burma to Phongsaly; the other took them first from Burma to Luang Phrabang, then to Phongsaly. The first migration route is said to be the oldest. The Phounoy date it back to the mid-18th and early 19th centuries. The Phounoy were then living in Vieng Phou Kha (Luang Namtha Province today), a region that was under the authority of the Burmese at the time. Following a war between the Burmese and the Chinese, they appear to have fled to Phongsaly through the Sipsong Panna and settled southwest of the current district of Phongsaly. It would seem they founded the first villages at the source of the Pe River,¹² a tributary of the Ou River near Lue villages, whose inhabitants taught them Buddhism. The second migratory route is linked to the history of the Lue in the Phongsaly region, notably the story of the marriage of a princess from Sipsong Panna, who brought the *muang* of Yo, Boun Tai and Boun Neua as the dowry for her marriage to a son of the king of Luang Phrabang. The Lue versions of this story say that the Phounoy were part of the princess’s retinue who accompanied her to Luang Phrabang.¹³ As the princess was later repudiated by her husband, her people went back with her to the north, travelling up the Ou River to Boun Neua and Yo.¹⁴ The Phounoy themselves recount that after a war between Burma and the realm of Luang Phrabang, their ancestors were captured and brought to Luang Phrabang as prisoners at about the same time that the princess and her followers were on their way there. Profiting from the departure of the Lue (or soon afterwards, following their lead) the Phounoy fled from Luang Phrabang. They were hunted down by the king’s soldiers but managed to evade their enemies. They went up the Ou River, following the same route as the Lue, but settled close to Hatsa, in the mountains bordering the river.

¹² The Pe River runs through the southwest of the region inhabited by the Phounoy, in the current district of Phongsaly.

¹³ The Tai Lue from Boun Neua, Boun Tai and Yo have numerous accounts of this marriage. In their narratives, the Lue princess is called ‘the young lady with perfumed hair,’ Nang Phom Hom. Other versions relating to this princess exist in Northern Laos (see Peltier 1995; Evrard and Chanthaphilith 2011).

¹⁴ According to P. Cohen (1999: 53), for whom these events date back to the 14th century: “In Laos migration reached as far south as Luang Phrabang with the establishment of the Lue village of Ban Phanom. Here the original settlers accompanied wives offered as tribute (*tawaai*) by Sip Song Panna princess to the Lao king Fa Ngum in the fourteenth century.” In fact, the Tai Lue inhabitants of the village of Phanom Noy, a few kilometers from Luang Phrabang, today maintain that they are the descendants of members of the princess’s escort (Trankell 1999: 203). The Royal Chronicles of the kingdom of Luang Phrabang say that between 1623 and 1681, the king of Sipsong Panna took refuge with his sister and his family in the realm of Lan Xang; the sister of the prince married the son of King Sourinyavong, Prince Latsabout (Lorrillard 1995: 21; Le Boulanger 1931: 129). Another marriage is mentioned in 1782 between a Lue princess from Muang La and the grandson of Latsabout, Tjao-Vong (Le Boulanger 1931: 197).

As I have mentioned above, the “Phounoy” were then different small groups speaking closely related languages who began to fight against one another when they arrived in the Phongsaly area. Indeed, their migratory stories describe a progressive but violent settlement in the region by several small groups bearing names that are today known to be names of Phounoy clans. About 30 years ago, Ferlus (1969) identified a significant body of stories relating how certain clans settled in the Phongsaly region. These settlement stories also mention a period of war between the different Phounoy groups, the cause of which was clearly land possession. The names of most of these groups (Thoum Khong, Mating, P’soum) were also the names of villages, some of which still existed in the region around thirty years ago. These narratives seem to indicate that a community’s affiliation to its particular village was — or became — an important distinguishing factor for the small Phounoy language groups. In short, the groups were a long way from forming a homogenous group that shared a common name and identity. On the contrary, there were myriad small groups, none of which were named ‘Phounoy.’ They referred to themselves by their clan name and/or the name of the village they occupied.

A region at the crossroads of several kingdoms

The Phounoy settled at the intersection of several kingdoms (Fig. 1). In the southeast, the territories of Muang Khoa and Muang Houn, on the banks of the Ou River, appear to have been attached to the Lao kingdom of Lan Xang since ancient times. The Ou River was a strategic point from which incursions came from the north. According to the translation of *Nithan Khoun Borom* (Annals of the Kingdom of Lan Xang) proposed by Doré (1987: 659), in the 14th century the territory of Lan Xang extended to the city of Muang Khoa (currently in the southeast of Phongsaly Province). The area is described in these records as being part of the *Khoun nai khop muang*, that is, areas at the margins of the kingdom whose function was essentially to shelter military garrisons to repel potential invasions.

The territory corresponding to the current districts of Boun Neua and Boun Tai, in the southwest of the province, seems to have belonged to the neighboring Sipsong Panna and more specifically to the *Panna* (district) of Mengla.¹⁵ This area appears to have been formerly ‘attached,’ meaning that its leaders paid a tribute, to the kingdom of Lan Xang, then to Luang Phrabang (Pavie 1898; Aymé 1930). Lands beyond the mountains that separate the basin of the Black River from the Ou River basin seem to have belonged to the principality of the Sipsong Chau Tai from a fairly early period. According to Gay (1989: 212), it was a customary border, “which respects the traditional boundaries that separate the Sip Song Chau Tai from the Panna of Muang Ou, the kingdom of Luang Phrabang and Houa Phan Ha Tang Hoc.” Finally, the Muang Ou Tai and Ou Neua, which are north of the present province of Phongsaly, constituted the eleventh Panna of the Lue principality (they were ceded to France and incorporated into Laos in 1895). Imprecision remains in regard to the territories between the *muang* of Boun Tai and Boun Neua and the Ou River, a mountainous area occupied by Phounoy language groups but also by Austro-Asiatic

¹⁵ The principality of the Sipsong Panna (“the twelve districts”) consisted of twelve constituencies, each one grouping together several vassal *muang* in an enlarged administrative framework to strengthen the control of central government (Liew-Herres, Grabowsky and Wichasin 2012). Aymé (1930: 111) also mentions that certain villages located close to the muang of Boun Neua were dependencies of the Lue kings of the Sipsong Panna until 1896.

language peoples (Khmu), then later, by Tibeto-Burmans (Akha). To sum up, politically, Muang Ou territories in the north were attached to the Lue realm of Sipsong Panna; the allied principalities of Sipsong Panna and Sipsong Chau Tai were in the east and west; and in the south, the *muang* of Boun Neua, Boun Tai and Khoa were part of the kingdom of Luang Phrabang: in the center, an area with no clear political claim over it remained, occupied by Phounoy and by Austro-Asiatic speakers (especially Khmu speakers).¹⁶

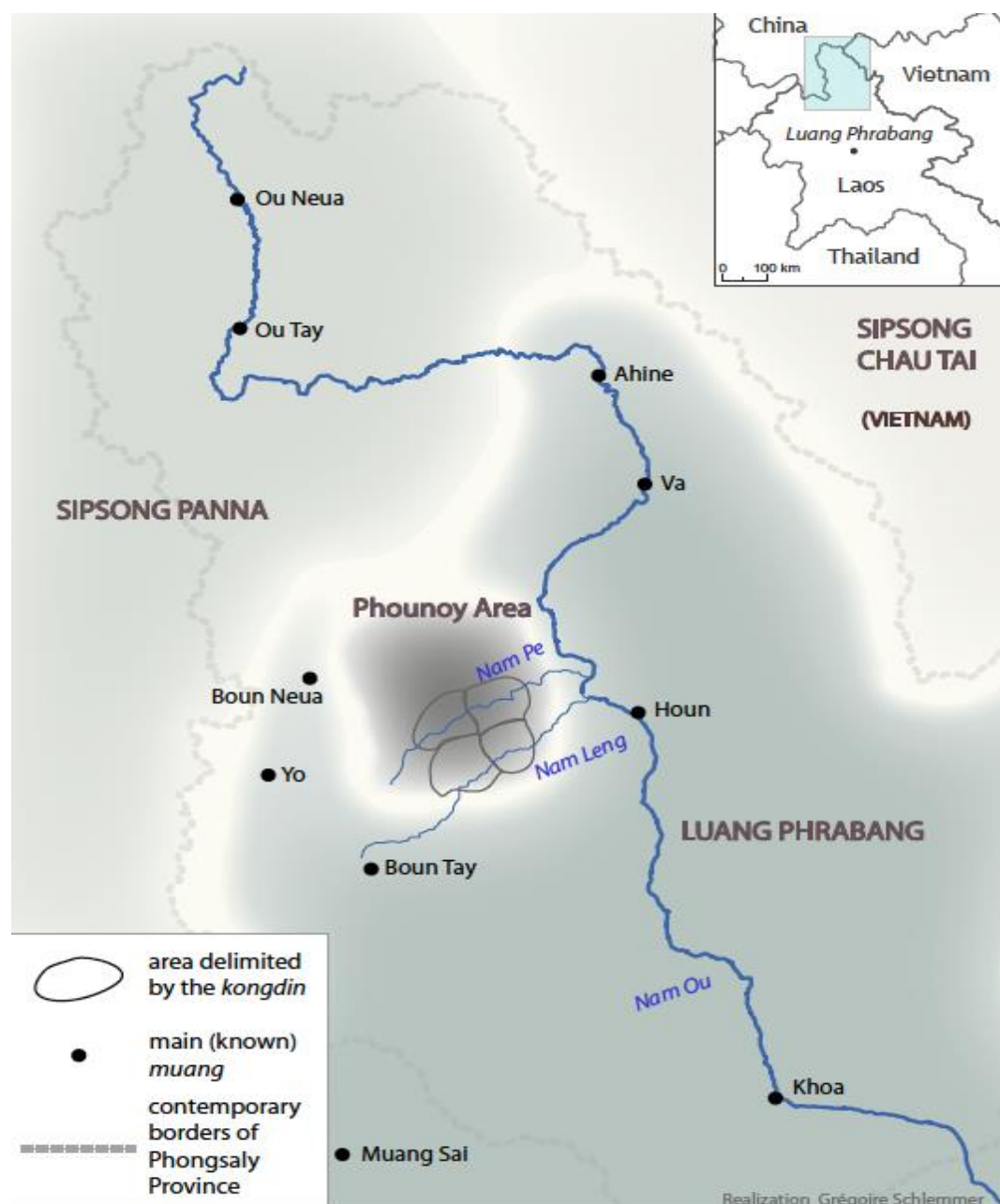


Figure 1: Area delimited by the Phounoy's Kongdin in the realm of Luang Phrabang in the second half of the 18th century

¹⁶ Roux (1924: 453) and Doze (1955: 34) noted that this territory had been called Muang Khang (“the Middle Land”) by the Laotians because of its location in the center of several *muang* inhabited by Tai or Lao populations. This term, designating the territory occupied by the Phounoy, is also mentioned in some royal edicts (see below) which were given to them in the 19th century as: *Phong Phounoy ngouang kang* (ພົງຟູນຸງ ນະງຸງກັງ).

Because of its geographical position at the intersection of several principalities, the region where the Phounoy found refuge had been at the heart of unrest affecting the realm of Luang Phrabang for a long time. This region served as a strategic zone where the warring factions could find refuge or retreat, but it was also inhabited by various highland populations whose allegiance tended to vary according to changes in the regional balance of power.

The history of the Phongsaly region, as recounted in the Royal Chronicles of Luang Phrabang (according to the versions given by Le Boulanger in 1931, Phinith in 1987 and Lorrillard in 1995), shows how the mountain populations were used as mercenaries during the wars between the region's various principalities. At the beginning of the 18th century, Prince Inthasom, who had taken refuge in the Sipsong Panna, was fighting his brother, King Kitsarat, for the realm of Luang Phrabang. To this end, he recruited the mountain populations in the current province of Phongsaly, with whose help he aimed to capture Luang Phrabang. However, the royal troops proved to be stronger and forced the prince and his soldiers to retreat back along the Ou River. It is possible that some Phounoy language groups might have been among the mercenaries who had joined ranks with the prince.

Nevertheless, the inhabitants of the bordering mountain areas were then targeted by means of integration, not only because the prosperity of the local Lao elite depended on their control, but also because these border populations constituted a potential barrier against aggressions from neighboring principalities. In Phongsaly, the border zones were reorganized, notably by bestowing a special status on the mountain groups. The Phounoy were then appointed as border guards in the middle of the 18th century, and were given *Kongdin* documents.

Mid 18th century: The attribution of written documents known as the Kongdin for the Phongsaly region

According to accounts given to me by the Phounoy — corroborating the observations of the French military at the beginning of the 20th century (Guillemet and O'Kelly 1916: 75; Roux 1924: 452) — the king of Luang Phrabang had made them responsible for defending the frontiers of the kingdom since ancient times. It is therefore possible that this nomination immediately followed the disturbances within the principality of the Sipsong Panna in the second half of the 18th century.

Even though it was not unusual for Tai leaders to bestow the status of border guards on highland populations, it was extremely rare to accompany this gesture by providing written documents, as was the case in Phongsaly (Bouté, 2011: 63–64). In conjunction with this role of border guards, from the first half of the 18th century the king of Luang Phrabang handed over the first *Kongdin* documents to certain Phounoy leaders.

These documents, called the “Books of the Land” (*peum Kongdin*, ປຶ້ມກຳດິນ) and written in tham Lue or Lao script,¹⁷ established the limits of the territories that the king of Luang Phrabang had given to the Phounoy-speaking groups in charge of protecting the frontiers. From the 16th century, the king of Luang Phrabang sent

¹⁷ The Lao (and more generally the Buddhist Tai) have two forms of writing: one called ‘tham’ derived from the Pégou scripture (Burma) and used for religious texts; the other, the ‘Soukhotai’ comes from Khmer writing and is used for ordinary texts (Finot 1917: 25–26).

several books (*Kongdin*) showing the limits of the realm in the northern frontier region of North Laos, mainly in Houa Phan.¹⁸ As these books documented the limits of a territory, they were often in the possession of the Tai kingdoms. The books explained how the borders of the territory had been established (Phinith 1989: 195). It appears that these ‘books’ were given to communities whose attachment to the kingdom of Luang Phrabang was periodically contested by wars between neighboring kingdoms. Those given to the Phounoy language groups were written on thin strips of palm leaves, about four centimeters wide and forty centimeters long (Fig. 2). At one end is a stamp inscribed with the king’s seal (which is represented by an elephant). These strips are rolled up and always placed in a round black lacquer box.



Figure 2: Part of the *Kongdin* script held by the Lava clan among the Phounoy (1750)

These books were apparently given to certain clans, or groups, among the Phounoy. To a certain extent, the people who received the ‘books’ became the recipients of royal authority on the lands they occupied, and were thus given the title ‘Masters of the Earth’ (*chao din*, ເຈົ້າດິນ)—a title passed on, along with the books, from father to son. According to the Phounoy, the people who received these books came from the clan that founded a village or a group of villages, and so the area supposed to be their domain. Perhaps they were chosen on the basis of criteria such as their proficiency in writing, like the ennobled Khounen leaders of Muang Phou Kha (Lefèvre-Pontalis 1902: 147). It is worth drawing attention to this fact as it would substantiate the hypothesis that the Phounoy populations already practiced Tai Lue Buddhism in the first half of the 18th century,¹⁹ which no doubt explains why the most ancient *Kongdin* were not written in *tham* Lao but in *tham* Lue script.

I found four *Kongdin* in the village where I stayed the most. The first two are written in *tham* Lue script. They begin by directly giving the date: in CS 1111 on the fifth waxing day of the third month, which would mean Monday, 12 January 1750.²⁰ Then they give a list of places: the first two lines of the two *Kongdin* are identical; the others differ with respect to the border limits set out. One of them names the area delineated “the land of the Phoutin and Phoumeut,” two terms that are names of local mountains but that have been described by the Phounoy as having been clan names. Both territories correspond to an area around the Pe River (see Fig. 1). The two others, dated 1774 (CS 1136), begin with a declaration by Sen Kham Mounti, the *Lam*,²¹ announcing that he is handing over the *Kongdin*, written with another dignitary named Sen Sala, and is distributing it among several groups: the Singvay,

¹⁸ Lorrillard, *pers. comm.*, September 2002.

¹⁹ Today, the oldest Phounoy say that they were already Buddhists when they arrived in the region and that the first buildings constructed were pagodas.

²⁰ CS refers to the Chulasakkarat era or “little era,” commonly used in the Lao chronicles (the era begins its reckoning in the equivalent of AD 638). I would like here to express my gratitude to Volker Grabowsky who helped me date the two sets of *Kongdin* documents.

²¹ The *Lam* was a system of direct control of the mountain peoples by members of the Tai aristocracy, called *Pho Lam*. There were two types of *Pho Lam*: those who, chosen among members of the Court, operated on the level of the *muang*, and those who were recruited from people close to the head of the *muang*, operating on a village level (Lemoine 1997: 180).

the Thailek and the Phoumeut. However, these two documents allocate different limits to the territories, though they have common borders. The two locations correspond to an area slightly southeast of the first one, beside the Leng River, another tributary of the Ou River (see Fig 2). Both documents end in the same way: one establishes that the territories are located to the south of those belonging to the two Lao dignitaries Sen Ahine and Sen Vang, and stipulates: “This is the *Kongdin* of the Phoumeut and the Thailek,” two Phounoy clans; the other certifies that this land was attributed to “masters of small mountains” (*meun moungh khoun phou noy*, ຜົນນ ມຸງຄຸນພູນ້ອຍ) – here we can find the first mention of the term “Phou noy,” here understood as “little mountains.”

Certain topographical elements mentioned in the *Kongdin* are easy to identify, such as the Pe and Leng Rivers, as well as the summits of the Phou Tin, Phou Sang and Phou Lava mountains. The Phounoy considered each territory delimited as being the domain of the clans of those who received these “books.” These four domains are adjacent to one another and cover four different areas located between the Pe and the Leng Rivers, or the southern part of the district of Phongsaly to the frontier with Muang Boun Tai (Fig. 1). This explains why the information subsequently provided in the *Kongdin* often mentions the latter territory. The texts do not stipulate the number of villages or inhabitants in these territories. According to the interviews I carried out among the Phounoy, perhaps six or seven of these *Kongdin* had been given to certain clans among the small Phounoy language groups,²² and some elders stated that each domain in the first half of the 20th century comprised four to six villages.

Most of the other *Kongdin* that the Phounoy remembered can no longer be found, as they either disappeared in village fires or their owners got rid of them because of the rigorous constraints surrounding their possession.²³ But it is still possible to have an idea of the total area covered by all the *Kongdin* handed over to the Phounoy, for although the elders insisted that no one was now capable of reading them, the owners of the books were still aware of the limits and attributions of a territory to a particular clan, as the Phounoy had bestowed a ritual function on them. In the event of war or accidental or violent death, the borders of their land as described in the *Kongdin* were to be recited by the owner of the *Kongdin*, holding the book during a ritual. These rituals took place, depending on the area, until the 1960s and 70s. A ceremony paying tribute to the *Kongdin* was also organized annually during the New Year celebrations (*Pimay*). In the village of Thongpi, for example, such a ceremony took place until 2006 (Fig. 3), after which date the village disappeared.

²² These were the Lava, Phoutin, Phoumeut, Thailek and Singvay clans (*angtchou*, in Phounoy), according to the four documents that have been found. The interviews reveal that other Phounoy clans received the *Kongdin*: the Tapat clan (north of the present-day town of Phongsaly; curiously, the people here maintain that the frontiers were not written on palm leaves but on an elephant bone), the Tongmoumouba clan (an area corresponding to Mount Phou Fa, and the Ong Yao clan (an area near Boun Neua). Two groups speaking a language similar to Phounoy, the Phoumon and the Phongsek, seemed also to have possessed some (their *Kongdin* covered an area to the east of the territory, including the villages of Phousoum and Phayasi), as well as two or three Phounoy villages located on the left bank of the Ou River. Outside the Phounoy zone, the elders of the Khmu village of Phoukho (southwest of the area inhabited by the Phounoy) and those of the Khmu village of Phya Sou (an area adjacent to the former one, in the west) claim that they also received the *Kongdin*, but that these documents disappeared several decades ago.

²³ The constraints relating to the possession of the books meant notably that they were only to be touched during a ritual, they were to be celebrated on Buddhist holidays (*van sin*), and homage (*soma*) was to be paid to the book during the New Year ceremonies and other ceremonies. For more information on these ritual ceremonies, the powers attributed to the *Kongdin* and the clan territories, see Bouté 2011, pp. 79–82, 127–142.

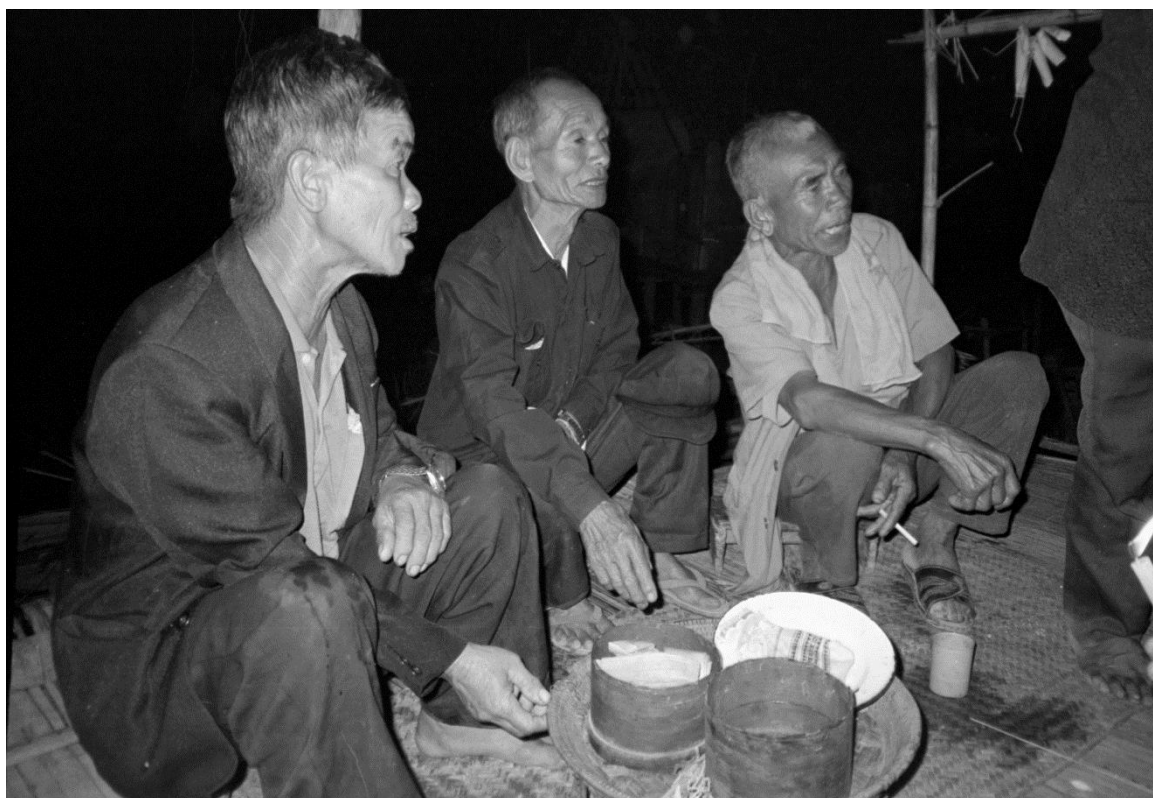


Figure 3: A Phounoy ceremony to pay tribute to the Kongdin during the Buddhist New Year (Pimay)

This royal acknowledgement of the territorial rights of certain populations seems to have pacified and consolidated the links between the central power and the outlying populations. It also fixed the limits of the realm, which until then had remained somewhat vague depending on the allegiance of the leaders in these outlying areas. Finally, establishing borders was also a way of pacifying a group that was already living in the territory.

Thus, in the second half of the 18th century, the conferment of border-guard status and the handover of the books, ratifying the rights of some of the Phounoy in their territories, represented the first steps toward the region's integration into the realm of Luang Phrabang. This resulted in a disparity between other ethnic groups and the Phounoy, who had a special relationship with the realm of Luang Phrabang and enjoyed a certain prestige. They came closer to the status held by the Tai populations and because of this were distinguished from the whole group, pejoratively called *Kha*—a Lao term that designates non-Tai groups, and also a generic term indicating the social status of servile people.

This may also be the beginning of a process of endorsement of the exonym "Phou noy" (small mountains) by the groups appointed as border guards, as one of the 1774 *Kongdin* states. Throughout the Peninsula, other examples can be found of the attribution of a Tai name to a territory and, by extension, to the population it occupies. In the Shan States, Scott and Hardiman (1900: 577) referred to the Lahu groups (probably the same as those identified as border guards), living in a muang called "*Muang Kwi*" (Kwi being the name by which the Shan designated the Lahu). Similarly, the name of the territory occupied by the Khouen was made up of the pejorative term *kha* used by the Tai: *Muang Phou Kha* "the territory of servile people" (Lefèvre-Pontalis 1902).

II. The strengthening of authority over the populations during the 19th century under pressure from the Siamese

In the 19th century, due to recurring instability, the realm of Luang Phrabang reinforced its interest in the territories and their populations situated inside its borders. Luang Phrabang was affected by various conflicts: insurrection in the upper regions of the Ou River, internal wars in the principality of Sipsong Panna, invasions by armed gangs known as ‘Flags’ (black, yellow, etc.) from the Yunnan, along the Ou River. The Siamese authorities²⁴ encouraged the king of Luang Phrabang to launch a major policy of control in his territory through the political reorganization of the *muang* satellites and the confirmation of the powers of governors and other competent authorities in these areas (Smuckarn and Breazeale 1988: 59).

Locally, in the region of Phongsalay, especially in the mountainous area between the Tai Lue *muang* to the west and the Lao *muang* to the east (along the Ou River), this interest was shown by dispatching several royal edicts to the holders of the *Kongdin* and giving them noble status. Indirectly, these two actions completed the transformation of Phounoy society, based on the model of the Tai *muang*.

Reinforcement of the local leaders’ rights and duties

I mentioned earlier that today, the Phounoy consider that the *Kongdin* were given to them in order to guard the frontiers of the kingdom of Luang Phrabang. Indeed, one episode of the Luang Phrabang Royal Chronicles tells of the nomination of populations as border guards in the mid-19th century as a result of the king of Luang Phrabang’s intervention in the north of the realm. When confronted with rebellions, the prince of Sipsong Panna had indeed asked the king of Luang Phrabang, his ally, to come to his aid. Lorrillard (1995: 261–262) transcribes the event as follows: “in 1841 (...) Chao Ouparat gave orders (...) to Phya Si Thamma Nakhone Lok to go and camp at Muang Boun Tai with 800 men, and to Chao Souvanna Phomma, Chao Souk as well as Phya Cha Ban to lead 800 men to settle in Muang Ahine (...). He then ordered some Thao-Phya(s) to ensure the surveillance of the boundaries with the necessary armies.” In other words, the Viceroy, representing the royal council, after sending an armed mission led by several local dignitaries, delegated the surveillance of the borders to local leaders. Since nothing is mentioned about the identity of these “Tao-Phyas”—two terms that designate noble Tai titles—I argued that it is likely they were the Phounoy as they were the only inhabitants that had been given the title of border guards, even though the first *Kongdin* had been handed over to them nearly a century earlier (Bouté 2011).

This hypothesis is now corroborated by a royal edict dated 1844,²⁵ which was given to one of the descendants of a recipient of the *Kongdin*, later said to be from the ‘Phoutin’ clan, which defined an area between what were then the villages of Thongpi up to the Chapou and Kodeng villages (see Fig. 4). The dignitary is referred to by the

²⁴ Since the end of the 18th century, Luang Phrabang realm had been a vassal to Siam (former realm of Ayutthaya).

²⁵ The edict states: “The year 1206, year of the dragon (*kap si*), 2nd month, 13th day of the waxing moon, Tuesday.”

name of Sen Pheuak.²⁶ Several sections (*matha*) of this royal edict also refer to the autonomy of the Phounoy dignitaries in the areas that they guard, to the protection of the land and local populations, and to taxes.

According to the edict, the Phounoy dignitary was expected to restore some stability in the territory under his control and to be able to preserve the population: “Let people come to the country, repopulate the villages and towns so that the situation may be as stable as in the past.” One section states that he was notably required to mobilize the village chiefs (*thao-khoun*) under his jurisdiction in order to maintain local populations (*bao-phai*) within the territory, or bring them back if “they are afraid, if they take refuge elsewhere, in a small village or a big *muang*, towards streams or in deep forests, anywhere.” We can see here the constant concern of the Tai sovereigns to control the demographics of their kingdom, the power of the latter being measured more by the number of its subjects than by its size (Grabowsky 1999; Tambiah 1976: 122). Wars were one of the main causes of significant migratory flows in the region between northern Laos, South China, the Shan States and North Vietnam.²⁷ The edict recommends the utmost gentleness and persuasion—not force—to bring the subjects back and keep them, requiring the dignitaries to allow them to settle at their discretion in the territory of Sen Phouak or that of his neighbor Sen Phongsimun, another Phounoy dignitary.²⁸ They are also required to provide a warm welcome to any other new arrivals—Ho, Akha, Yao or Lue, among others²⁹—who might wish to become royal subjects. In other sections of this royal edict, we learn about the other attributes or responsibilities of the dignitary: he must collect taxes from those he governs (paid in the form of forest products) and he benefits from a type of remuneration, in the form of labor, provided by these inhabitants.

On several occasions, the text insists on the attention that must be given to any potential abuse of local populations, be it by Sen Pheuak himself (who is asked not to put too much pressure on his citizens³⁰) or by traders or foreigners not commissioned by the royal council who would seek to take advantage of the people. The intention may have been to prevent certain people from fleeing the realm in an attempt to escape the obligatory duties and/or to achieve a certain social cohesion as the text clearly states; a section of the royal edict states: “if the boat sinks, we must row together, in normal conditions, we can steer the boat together in peace. We must take the vegetables and put them in the basket, bring the people together and put them in

²⁶ This might have been an ancestor (father or grandfather) of the Phaya Soulinya (*discussed later*), as the document was found with the edicts naming the Phaya, all of which were in the possession of the descendants of the Phaya.

²⁷ It would seem that more than half of the present-day populations of Phongsaly Province arrived during the 19th century; almost all elders among them mention wars as the reason for their relocation (Schlemmer 2012).

²⁸ Sen Phongsimun is a character who is still very vivid in the Phounoy memory; he is said to have fought against the Ho as far as the Sipsong Panna (Bouté 2006). Some older Phounoy claim that he was born in 1812 and that the territory he controlled was located near to the Phou Fa mountain (then called Phou Ha), that is, north of the area controlled by the Sen Phouak mentioned here. Certain Phounoy elders described the Phou Ha area as the border between the kingdom of Luang Phrabang and the Sipsong Panna in the first half of the 19th century.

²⁹ The section of the *Kongdin* can be read and understood as follows: “Khoun Ho-sao Han [Chinois], Kha Li [not identified] the Kha Kho [Akha], Yao Gnin [Yao], the Yang-Yai [not identified, but the Tai Yang of the province sometimes refer to themselves as ‘Yang-Yai’], the Nyuane Kao [Lao ?] and Lue.”

³⁰ “The remuneration of Sen Phouak must be preserved, nothing must be added (...) if the subjects are not available or if they have no money, they must be neither mistreated nor fined.”

the *muang*,³¹ in this way Royal administration will be good.” Notably, the capability to mobilize the people if disturbances occurred that might create problems on the borders (*khanta sema*) was required.

We must remember that at this time, if the two mentioned Phounoy dignitaries had free management of their territory and its citizens, they had to first refer to the *muang* head for judgments and pass on the tributes paid to the king via the *Lam* (we will see that a few decades later, Phounoy leaders gained more autonomy and took their taxes to Luang Phrabang themselves). Meanwhile, the edict reiterates that the Phounoy in this domain are a free people (*phai* ໄຟ) and refers to them as the “spearhead of the kingdom” (*foung ni pen phai lam hok*, ຟຸ່ງນີເປັນໄຟລ່າຫອກ). As such, they are exempt from any levies that might have to be paid by the servants and envoys of high dignitaries of the Court to other populations.³² Their role as frontier guards seems to have given the Phounoy a certain independence compared to other neighboring mountain groups.

In 1860,³³ another edict, ratified by the head of Muang Xay, was given to the Phounoy head of the village of Phou Ha, who had authority over the others, along with a second head of the village of Chapou (these are the two territories previously mentioned in the edict of 1844.³⁴) They both received various instructions, but their supreme order was to uphold justice by settling conflicts before the Tai Lue dignitaries of Boun Tai. The order was ratified by assuring the Phounoy (referred to here as *Bao-Phai*) that their privileged status would be maintained (“so they can be reassured, they will remain as they are; it has been this way for 9 generations until this year 1860,” says the text).

Indeed at that time, the Phounoy were supervised by the neighboring Tai Lue *muang* chiefs, who used to pejoratively call them not “people of the small mountains” (as in the *Kongdin* of 1774, see above) but “small people”; and indeed, the pronunciation of the two terms in Lao or Tai is very similar: it is “Phou noy” (but a small difference in the modulation of the first consonant “ph” changes the meaning, so, it is ພ for “mountain”; and ພ for “people”). The Phounoy appointed as border guards were, due to their geographical proximity, in more direct contact with the Lue populations who passed on their Theravada Buddhist beliefs and practices. They also had to go to a Lue village to get their salt. However, their relations proved to be potentially confrontational, or so it appeared in their oral accounts, according to which the Phounoy always won their fights against the Lue thanks to the power of their leader, Sen Phongsimun. Neis (1885: 61) also notes conflicts between the two groups in 1880: “The Paï Pou Noï told me that they did not manage to arrive in time for the water festival [in Luang Phrabang] because they were at war with the Lue, their neighbors.” The Phounoy population was organized into groups made up of several villages (which then became, after receiving the “Books of the Land,” domains). A more elaborate political organization compared to the other mountain

³¹ Literally: *Kep phak sai sa kep kha sai muang*. See Kraisi (1967) and Grabowsky (2001) who give different interpretations to this expression. Here in particular, there is no question of displacing people by force, but rather persuading them to return or to stay.

³² “Do not ask for shellfish taxes (*bia noi*), silver, clothes, cows and buffaloes, pigs, dogs, ducks and chickens, grain, rice and rice fields, and women as these people are free...”

³³ Year 1222, year *kot san* (monkey), month 7, 5th day of the waning moon, Saturday.

³⁴ The head of the Phou Ha was formerly Sen Phongsimun; the village of Chapou mentioned as the second territory belongs to the same group of villages of the Phoutin’s *Kongdin*.

peoples was thus formed, which would have enabled them to fight the Lue's tendency to control them, as we will see below.

The nomination of the Phaya (from 1880)

During the second half of the 19th century, the social and territorial organization of the area inhabited by the Phounoy adopted even more striking characteristics of a Tai *muang*. Titles of nobility hitherto reserved for Lue and Lao lords were awarded, and new dignitaries were appointed from the Phounoy leaders, who controlled far larger political and administrative territories than those of clans formerly defined by the *Kongdin*. Several facts prompted this restructuring: increasing unrest in the north, as well as Siamese and then French influence.³⁵

To strengthen the control of this region, the kings of Luang Phrabang carried out several military expeditions there. First, in 1869, the royal troops launched a brief attack against the Lue and Ho gangs, and withdrew, taking a number of prisoners (Smuckarn and Breazeale 1988: 37); then from 1875 to 1887, Ho incursions were particularly common throughout the Ou River basin; in 1887, it was the Siamese who, under the pretext of pursuing the Ho, did not hesitate to occupy Muang Houn, installing various detachments in Phounoy villages, and exercising authority over the Tai Lue in the south of the province (Aymé 1930: 110).

Within this context, from 1860—1870, the appointment of local leaders among the minorities of the Phongsaly region multiplied. This is demonstrated for the Phounoy by other royal edicts found among the descendants of dignitaries that establish the appointment of a particular leader (Sen) to the higher rank of Sen Phong Luang Soulinya (1865) or Sen Tham Khoun Mong. But we should note here that this royal gesture was also extended to other ethnics groups, notably the Khmu. Some ethnic Khmu chiefs, in the south of the province, received the title of “Phya.” One of them, referred to as “Phya Sou,” controlled an area next to the Phounoy dignitaries’ territory south of Phongsaly district and the Leng River; Phya Sou is also mentioned in the royal edict of 1868 sent to four Phounoy dignitaries, as well as in the 1880 edict (see below). Even farther south, the second Khmu leader, Phya Lek, controlled an area south of the present administrative center of Boun Tai. Later (1870–1890), many heads of Khmu villages around the Lao *muang* of Khoa gave themselves the title of *Phya* or *Lasa (Raja)*, even though their control did not go beyond the confines of their own village (their villages also remained dependent on the fathers of *lam* and heads of Lao Taseng belonging to Muang Khoa).³⁶ These data may be of interest to Lao ethnohistory, as they show that this phenomenon at the end of the 19th century was no longer restricted to the Phounoy, but was more widespread in Northern Laos.

In 1880, a second edict provides us with information that reflects the transformation of the Phounoy area’s political organization since the previous edict of 1868. A chief bearing the title of Phaya Soulinya Vongsa Phong Luang³⁷—a more

³⁵ Here, I will refer to a period between 1880, the date of the most recent edict found in possession of the descendant of Phaya Soulinya, and the 1930s.

³⁶ Many of the villages are still named after the dignitary today, such as the village of Phya Lek, or Phya Sou. I thank Gregoire Schlemmer (*pers. comm.*, December 2, 2013) for providing me with information on the Khmu villages history in the province of Phongsaly, based on oral narratives.

³⁷ The dignitary Thao Katthinya, nominated as Sen Phong Luang Soulinya in an edict dated 1865 and then mentioned in an edict dated 1868, is not the same as the person nominated as Phaya Soulinya Vongsa Phong Luang in 1880 and mentioned in the 1920s by the French military; he would have been at least 75 years old.

prestigious title than the previous titles of Sen and Phya—was the main recipient of the order. Better known as the Phaya Soulinya in oral narratives I collected from the Phounoy based in the area of Thongpi village (formerly Ban Phaya Soulinya) where I carried out my research between 1999 and 2005, this leader is mentioned in the order as being the main head of all villages in Phounoy territory (here named *Phong Phounoy* ພັງພູນ້ອຍ “the territory of small mountains” and the mountainous areas *fa khao*³⁸). Although the text was addressing four other Phounoy dignitaries and the Phya Sou of the Khmu area, it specifically commands the Phaya Soulinya to render justice in exceptional cases, assemble other dignitaries every year at the time of tribute, to go together and give their report to the royal palace, and receive valuable products (elephant teeth, ivory and rhino horns) that he will offer in person to the king. Unlike what was stated in the edicts of 1844 and 1860, matters of justice or the tribute should no longer be brought before a local Lao or Lue dignitary, as the Phaya is now directly responsible.

Some ten years later in 1894, when the members of the Auguste Pavie Mission, who were responsible for the demarcation of frontiers in the Luang Phrabang realm, arrived in the region, the territory corresponding to the province of Phongsaly was made up of Tai and Lao *muang* of Boun Neua, Boun Tai, Houn, Khoa and Ahine, and in the center, a territory occupied by a fraction of the border guard populations installed on the right bank. This zone, having the characteristics of a Tai *muang*, was at that time called Muang Phounoy, no doubt because of the relative autonomy of its inhabitants, their rudimentary organization in domains, the presence of ennobled leaders, and their location at the junction of several Tai Lue or Lao *muang*. Indeed, at the beginning of the 20th century, the French military noted that the inhabitants of the Muang Phounoy had a certain amount of autonomy compared to other mountain peoples. Nonetheless, it is this name that is entered on the map drawn up by Lefèvre-Pontalis in 1894. In 1916, the Fifth Military Territory was created, the contours of which resemble the province of Phongsaly as it is today. It was placed under both the administrative authority of the Superior Resident in Laos and the control of the realm of Luang Phrabang. It should, however, be noted that after 1880, no document coming from the Royal Court of Luang Phrabang was to be given to Phounoy dignitaries. The *muang* that made up this Fifth Military Territory, traditionally governed by Lue and Lao leading citizens, were successively reallocated by the French administration into cantons (*taseng*), ‘delegations,’ and finally divided into new administrative units also referred to as *muang*.

We also know that the younger brother of the Phaya Soulinya, Khamsan, would have been born in 1880 (he died in 1946 in his sixties). There would therefore be a 35-year age difference between the two brothers (assuming that Katthinya was 20 when he was named Saen Phong, in 1865), which is quite impossible. Moreover, all the children of the Phaya—whose only son, Ounkham, died in 1954—were, according to their descendants, born between 1890 and 1915. It is more probable that the dignitary mentioned in 1965 was the father of the Phaya, the documents (*Kongdin* and royal edicts) and the titles being handed down from father to son.

³⁸ This term written ພັງພູນ້ອຍ remains a mystery; *Fa* (ພັງ) could mean ‘the sky’; *Khao* could refer to the term ‘mountain’; *Fa khao* would mean ‘the mountains of the sky’, or the high mountains. I thank L. Gabaude, V. Grabowsky and R. Renard, who helped me search for a possible meaning for this term (that they also discovered for the first time). According to Inthamone, one could also read ພັງພູນ້ອຍ as ‘near to the mountains.’ There is also a very similar term in the Tai Chronicles of Mäng Khön (southwest of Yunnan), which uses *lōy fo fa* to designate the mountain territories occupied by the Jingpo and the Ta’aang [Bulang], (Daniels 2013b: 158).

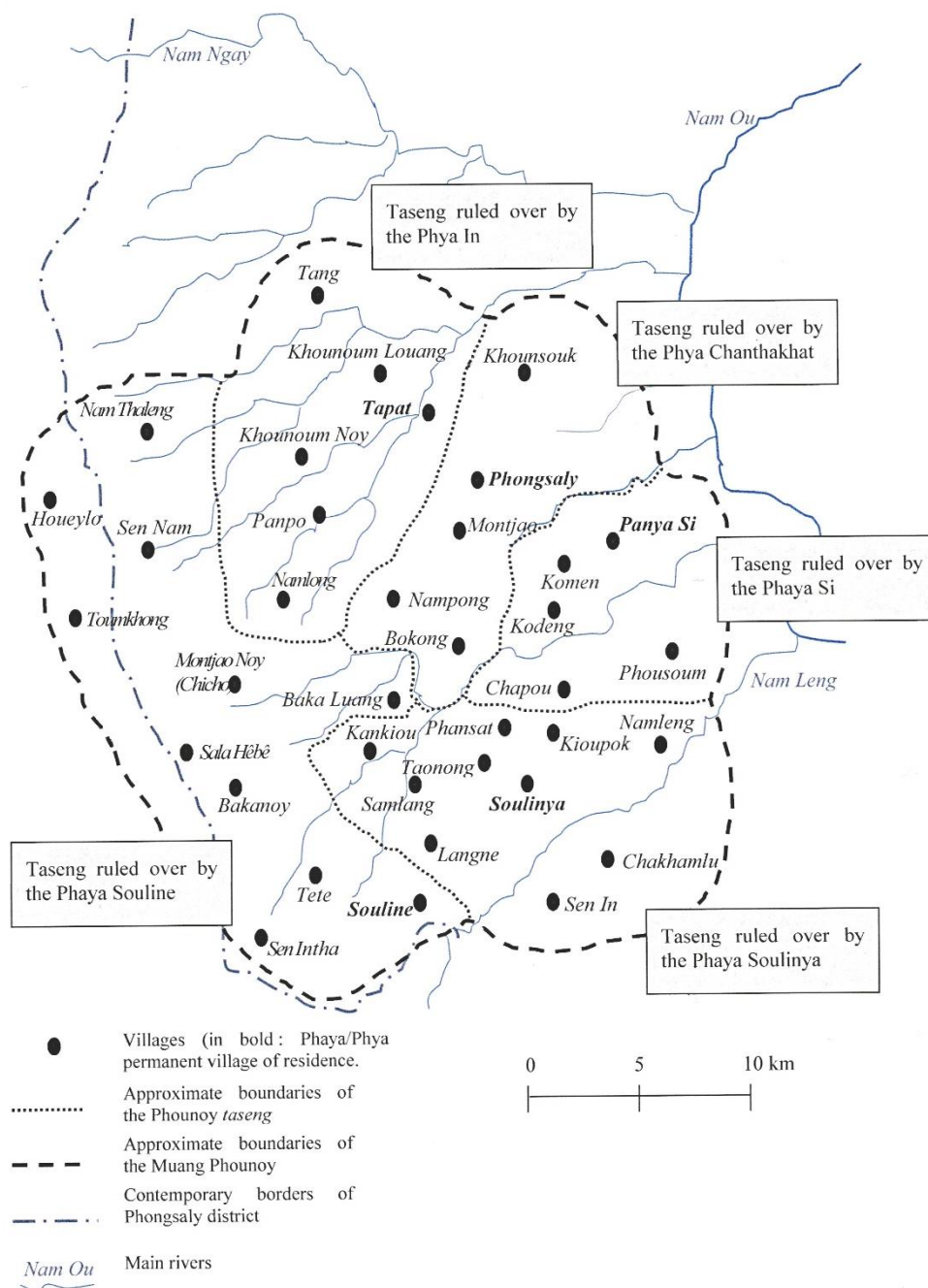


Figure 4: The Muang Phounoy and the five Taseng administered by the Phaya and Phya in the 1910s

Shortly before (or at the same time as) the reorganization of the region by the French, the four other Phounoy leaders (mentioned previously in the royal decree of 1880) or their sons³⁹ along with Ho leader Phaya Somphou⁴⁰ received the titles *Phya* and *Phaya*.⁴¹ According to the Phounoy elders, Phaya Soulinya and three of the other dignitaries were chosen from those with ancestors who had received the *Kongdin*, the so-called Masters of the Earth. The fifth one, Phya Chanthakhat, was not a Master of the Earth and was nominated at a later date. The creation of the *taseng* that he was to govern no doubt corresponds to the importance of the small village of Sen Sili, which the French renamed Phongsaly and which became the administrative center of the Fifth Military Territory in 1921 (Aymé 1930: 123).

Each territory (*taseng*) governed by a *Phaya* or a *Phya* Phounoy included two or three clan domains, but we do not know how the decisions were made to divide the territory and regroup certain domains into *taseng*. The ten or so domains of the Phounoy groups were regrouped into four, then five new units, the *taseng*, which formed the Muang Phounoy (Fig. 4). Each Phaya or Phya ruled over a *taseng*. The Phaya Soulinya's *taseng*, in the southwest of the Muang, comprised ten villages; to the east of this area, Phaya Souline was the leader of ten villages. To the northwest, was Phaya Si's *taseng*, with five villages. The northern part of the Muang was divided into two smaller *taseng*: the Phya In (with six villages), and the Phya Chanthakhat, with five villages.

The five Phounoy dignitaries thus benefited from a greater autonomy than the other group leaders (the former Khmu dignitaries, for instance, remained under the jurisdiction of their neighboring Lao muang leaders in Muang Khoa). Generally, the canton (*taseng*) is an administrative unit that is part of a larger human and geographical unit—the *muang*—governed by a leader. But the Phounoy were not placed under the authority of a Lao or Lue *muang* leader and were directly responsible to the governor of the province authority (*Nai Khouang*). They were therefore “independent in law,” in accordance with the terms used by Aymé (1930: 72). According to Guillemet and O’Kelly (1917: 198), this situation resulted from their status as border guards: “the court of Luang Prabang considered them to be the border guards of the kingdom and as such, always treated them in a special way, as a small State. Their leaders are the natural intermediaries between them and the Kings officials.”

The name previously attributed by the Tai populations (first the Lao King via the Royal Edict, then the Tai Lue chiefs) to a territory inhabited by small groups with a particular status then became, for the colonial administrators, the ethnonym of the inhabitants of this locality. The inhabitants of Muang Phounoy, with their clearly

³⁹ The stories gathered from the descendants of these dignitaries bring to light a certain correspondence between the names mentioned in this edict and the names of those considered to be the fathers (or grandfathers, depending on the story) of the Phaya: Sen Southama and Sen Sivongsa (edict of 1880) would respectively be the grandfather and father of the Phaya Si and the Phaya In; Sen Inta Panya Vongsa would be the former name of the Phaya Souline (who is also said to be the descendant of Sen Phongsimun, mentioned in the edict of 1844).

⁴⁰ The Ho is a Han population originating from Yunnan. Phaya Somphou, the Ho dignitary elevated to the status of Phaya, was born in 1881 and died in 1931 (dates indicated on his tomb, Phongsaly Province); it is therefore likely that he had gained this title in the 1900s. On the Ho leader, see also Daniels (2013a: 22).

⁴¹ The Phounoy *Phaya* and *Phya* seemed to appear between 1880, the year of the royal decree addressed to Phaya Soulinya, and 1916, the year when the existence of the Phounoy dignitaries was first mentioned (Guillemet and O’Kelly 1916). It should be noted that these dates corroborate information collected from the Phounoy themselves.

delimited territories and their particular institutions, thus unified, had the feeling they were different from those situated at the periphery. The name of the territory that had been used to designate the inhabitants in reference to their social status ("Phou noy") was progressively taken on by the latter.

Strengthening the distinction: Social and political organization of the Phaya's territories

At the beginning of the 20th century, the adaptation of the Tai political and administrative system to the scale of this upland population, underscored by the ennoblement of local leaders, was completed by the French when they reorganized the administrative structure of the villages themselves. The smallest ones, with less than twenty houses, were no longer considered autonomous entities and were grouped with other small villages or larger units. New authorities were nominated. These village authorities were given Lao titles again: the position of the leader was renamed *Sen long*, perhaps to mark the difference of status with that of his deputy (*Sen kouan*, designated by methods of which we know very little). There were also people put in charge of districts (*Sen phrasi*). Roux (1924: 490) indicates that these individuals were called "*nai ngeu'n*," or "head of the money," which may indicate that they acted as tax collectors in their district.

The titles remained hereditary as was the case prior to the colonial period, and so the new titles of *Phaya* and *Phya* passed on to the eldest son. The *Phaya* received, in addition to their title, the insignia of their new position: a sword, a small drum, cymbals and a flag. The *Phaya* often gave their name to the village in which they lived (*Ban Phaya Si*, *Ban Phaya Soulinya*, *Ban Phaya Souline*). They were mainly responsible for relations between the people under their jurisdiction and the central government. They organized tax collection (in kind or money), supervised construction works and maintained roads and buildings reserved for the military. The *Phaya* also acted as judges in the event of inter-village conflicts.

If colonial writings do not mention a hierarchy among these leaders, many Phounoy – from all areas now establish a hierarchy among the five dignitaries: "Before, Thongpi [former residence of Phaya Soulinya] was a village far larger than Phongsaly. People from Phongsaly had the Phya, who was responsible for helping the Phaya," says a village elder from Phongsaly. "All the villages were dependent on Thongpi. At first there was only the Phaya Soulinya and when the French left, then returned, it is they who nominated the Phaya Si and the Phaya Souline because the area to control was too large for Soulinya," say residents of the ancient villages of Phaya Soulinya and Phaya Souline. The French military came to the same conclusion: "There are several group leaders who have under their control a certain number of localities. Of all of these leaders, Panya-Soulignat, with his clever and cunning face, seems to have established himself and have the most authority," says Cheyrou-Lagrèze (1921: 34), while Roux (1924: 452) notes: "Those who are the best informed about the actions of their ancestors are the two greatest leaders Phaya Soulinia and Phaya Soulintakhet."

The ennoblement of local leaders and the pyramidal organization of the territory (the domains integrated into the *taseng*, which were part of the Muang Phounoy) brought to light social differences between and within the Phounoy villages. Thereafter, the Tai administrative system was applied within the villages whose organization had not previously been based on a hierarchical system (Bouté 2007).

Following these appointments, the *Phaya* behaved in the same way as the Tai Lue lords, and the Phounoy social environment reproduced the *muang* model. The *Phaya* controlled several villages and had, theoretically, power of life and death over his subjects. He benefited from free labor to work his fields and received taxes in kind and a leg of each animal hunted on his territory. He nominated the village heads, who received, in turn, some advantages as a result of their status. The powers granted by the king to the *Phaya* tended to create differences between villages. Often, the most populated villages where the *Phaya* lived acquired some level of prestige as they became important centers, where meetings between the district's village heads were held, and subsequently, various commercial transactions were carried out.⁴²

Observing this Tai model of organization, the French military personnel that settled in the region often made a distinction between the Phounoy and the other highland populations. They believed the former to be more trusting (Doze 1955: 33), or the most "likeable" people in the region (Guillemet and O'Kelly 1917: 324; Doze 1955: 33), which denotes a somewhat paternalistic attitude, underlining the privileged relations that the French managed to establish with the Phounoy, "the tribe in the Territory that is the easiest to command" concluded Aymé (1930: 40). They also considered them to be extremely hardworking (Roux 1924: 451), as well as more civilized: "Even less than with the other Khas, the word "primitive," applied at random and wrongly to all the tribes of the race, could not be attributed to the Pou-Noi" (Guillemet and O'Kelly 1917: 198). As a result, the Phounoy were selected from among all the other mountain peoples to receive military training (Guillemet and O'Kelly 1917: 324), and, along with the Annamese, made up the French Indigenous Guard (Doze 1955: 34; Roux 1924: 451). Furthermore, they were the only upland people of the area allowed to attend French lessons in Luang Phrabang (Gay 1995: 235). Consequently, through their actions, the French helped to maintain, if not increase, the difference between the Phounoy and the other ethnic groups in the province until 1954.

Conclusions

In the broader context of the Indochinese peninsula, the opposition between the State societies of the plains and ethnic minorities in the mountainous border regions continues to be a subject for discussion among anthropologists and certain historians. Many ethnologists, extending the 'modernist' theories of ethnicity (against any form of cultural essentialism) and downplaying this opposition, emphasize a dynamic of development of the various societies through the interaction of one with the other. On the one hand, there are centralized societies that are formed by the progressive absorption of their margins, and on the other, the minorities, who have remained marginal, and whose distinctive identity is formed both by contact with the lowland populations in the plains and in reaction to them. From Leach (1954), to Izikowitz (1951) or Condominas (1980), this is how the inter-ethnic relations linked to the formation of "Tai political systems" (*Tai muang*) have been understood. It is also in this perspective that far more consideration has been given to the local history—oral and sometimes written—of this confrontation between *Civility and*

⁴² This is according to several old people that I questioned in the forty or so Phounoy villages still included in Phongsalay district in 1999.

Savagery, to quote the title of the book published by Turton (2000) about different perceptions of the regional influence of Tai State structures.

My study of how the Phounoy population's identity was formed follows these same lines of research that seek to analyze the relations between mountain minorities and the Tai and Lao principalities, not only from the point of view of the centers of power but also of the margins, that were subject to and had to deal with these dominant centers. But what emerges from the ethnography and from elements of local history that I have gathered is evidence of a special destiny that differs from that of other neighboring Tibeto-Burman or Austro-Asiatic minority populations. The Phounoy group appears to have emerged and developed through a privileged relationship with regional powers.

Not only have the Phounoy enjoyed a particularly advantageous political position, successively recognized as border guards by the king of Luang Phrabang, then allies of the colonial power and finally administrators of the province, they also largely borrowed from their Tai and Lao neighbors some of their cultural and ritual features, particularly Buddhism.⁴³ In doing so, they gradually created their own territory, a specific political and cultural entity, the Muang Phounoy, in many respects unique in the mountains of northern Laos, and they have established themselves as key intermediaries between the central government and the neighboring hill tribes (such as the Akha and Khmu).

Far from distancing themselves from the State, as is the case, according to Scott (2009), for most of the Highlanders of Southeast Asia, whose history is summed up as a continuous line of flight to preserve their autonomy, the Phounoy have made a point of working with the Lue and then the Lao authorities. They thus belong to those groups who show a tendency, sometimes under pressure, to participate in the management of local affairs while serving a dominant society.

⁴³ This aspect has not been developed in this article; see Bouté 2008 and Bouté 2011.

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Wat Tham Krabok Hmong and the Libertarian Moment

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Abstract

This paper discusses how one group that James Scott might consider “Zomians,” now enclosed by the state, retains anarchistic tendencies even in recent years. From the early 1990s until 2004, Wat Tham Krabok Temple (WTK) in Saraburi Province, Thailand was settled by thousands of undocumented Lao Hmong refugees. This movement was enabled by a combination of local historical contingencies, with the extra-legal machinations of high-level state factions connected to the temple’s abbot, that likely went unseen by the majority of WTK’s Hmong inhabitants. After being deterritorialized from their Lao homeland, many of these Hmong were seeking out spaces for an autonomous livelihood, political legitimacy, and cultural reterritorialization. The pseudo-legal documentation, political patronage, and safe space provided to WTK Hmong through the abbot’s prestige and state-level connections allowed this group of immigrants to briefly enter a fold in Thai state space that sheltered them from harassment by local state agents as they pursued livelihood, cultural, and spatial autonomy. However, within WTK space the Hmong were hierarchically subordinated to Thai monks and laity in their respective access to land, resources, and cultural legitimacy. As such, WTK Hmong subverted the temple’s power structures by manipulating cultural hybridized symbols and placing them in spaces of reterritorialization.

Introduction

James Scott’s (2009) recent work has brought unprecedented attention to the field of upland Southeast Asian studies and has drawn its own critiques (Jonsson 2012, 2010; Dove et al. 2011; Lieberman 2010; Formoso 2010; Tapp 2010). *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Southeast Asia* (hereafter *The Art*) is a daring work that draws on histories and ethnographic studies from across mountainous areas of mainland Southeast Asia and beyond, to construct a history of Southeast Asian upland minorities as anarchistic communities that have made the political decision to live in the uplands in order to escape the state. These uplanders, whom Scott—adapting an idea by Geographer Willem van Schendel (2002)—calls “Zomians,” use various forms of state escape. Scott describes escape agriculture, acephalous social structures, orality, and messianism as key methods of Zomian state evasion. Among these, the primary Zomian strategy for state evasion seems to be escape agriculture, or the use of shifting cultivation and other forms of livelihood to make Zomians less amenable to state appropriation and taxation. Scott admits, however, that this anarchistic construction of upland livelihood practices has been diminishing since 1950, due to the development of “distance-demolishing

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technologies”² (2009: 11). Acknowledging that the Lao Hmong who came to Wat Tham Krabok Buddhist Temple (hereafter WTK) in central Thailand fit much of Scott’s criteria for Zomian anarchists, this paper presents a version of the WTK Hmong story as a case study of change and continuity in anarchistic subjectivities since about 1945.

Admittedly, this group of Hmong people, like most others, does not perfectly fit Scott’s Zomian anarchist category. Having abandoned anything resembling escape agriculture or mountain spaces of refuge, the group occupies state territory and seeks citizenship over anarchy. However, Scott’s version of Zomian political subjectivity is an apt frame of reference for discussing this group even in the 21st century. In their everyday pursuit of an autonomous livelihood, these Hmong people circumvented requirements for Thai citizenship in their interactions with functionaries of local state interfaces (most importantly, the police). Their escape from this state infringement was facilitated by their patron Acharn Chamroon Parnchand and came, ironically, through appeals to authority elsewhere in the state. Reflecting on Abrams’s (1988) critique of the state as a reified or monolithic actor I hope to show that WTK and the WTK Hmong occupy a type of state space that is more complex than the ‘state space-nonstate space’ binary conception allows. In his 1977 article, Philip Abrams argues that “The state is not the reality which stands behind the mask of political practice. It is itself the mask which prevents our seeing political practice as it is.” In other words, the state is not a unified agent that homogenously fills the category we call state. Rather, what fills this space is a mesh of individual actors with differing and conflicting interests. I argue further that although the WTK Hmong have become generally entangled in state relations, they remain somewhat anarchistic in attitude, as evidenced by their attempts to gain autonomy from particular state relations and reterritorialize some space of their own on the grounds of WTK.

In making this argument, I reconstruct the history WTK’s group of Lao Hmong from the mid-20th century to the mid-2000s in order to show that WTK Hmong have some facets of libertarian attitude in their negotiations with state interfaces. I argue that during their refugee camp experience, many Hmong gained a stronger realization of the implications of their deterritorialization from Laos on their livelihood. In addition to state-level political reasons the migration of many Hmong to Wat Tham Krabok was also influenced by a tendency to seek out a space of reterritorialization that allowed for a return of male autonomous livelihood. This subjectivity is seen clearly in the tendency of these Hmong to inhabit *grey spaces*, or spaces where they perceived that the state infringed less directly on their livelihood pursuits. Through a combination of the political network of WTK’s abbott and other historical developments, Wat Tham Krabok Temple occupied a fold in Thai state space that Hmong people accessed, reterritorialized, and used to scratch out more autonomous livelihoods. This shows not only an ability to negotiate political and cultural difference and networks of power, but indicates that

² Speaking of the enclosing of Zomia, Scott notes, “This truly imperial project, made possible only by distance-demolishing technologies (all-weather roads, bridges, railroads, airplanes, modern weapons, telegraph, telephone, and now modern information technologies including global positioning systems, is so novel and its dynamics so different that my analysis here makes no further sense in Southeast Asia for the period after, say, 1950.” (2009: 11)

aspects of libertarian subjectivity (a somewhat oxymoronic term) remain with this group of Lao Hmong political exiles.

Research Background and Methodology

This article is based on a portion of ethnographic field research I did in Thailand over the summer of 2012, during which I conducted oral interviews in Thai and Hmong with current and former Hmong residents of Wat Tham Krabok in Saraburi, Phetchabun, Tak, and Chiang Rai provinces. I also spent one month at Wat Tham Krabok conducting interviews with monks and temple residents. My focus on monk and insurgent experiences admittedly privileges the voices of men. However, it should be noted that women figured prominently as both seekers and users of reterritorialized livelihood and religious space and had a key role in the story told here.

State Space

In *The Art*, Scott pits *nonstate space* against *areas of state control*.³ Because I will make use of similar terms, I should give some clarification and theoretical background regarding how I use words like *folds in state space*, *grey state space*, or *weak state space*. In her critique of James Scott's *Seeing like a State*, Tania Li (2005: 384) argues that, "There is [...] no spatial beyond that of the state, and there are no subjects outside power." Li, along with Timothy Mitchell,⁴ sees the state as something not wholly separate from society. The implicit assumption in this view is that state is not 'a thing' and is not separate from society; rather, if a state exists, it is a relation or an effect (Mitchell 1991) between actors. Contrary to the Weberian version of power, this more Foucauldian idea and its subsequent idea of states⁵ as diffuse relations of power not separate from society (existing everywhere and nowhere) would indicate that although some people see themselves as outside state control, as Scott's Zomians might have done, they have actually come into some engagement with the state and are inevitably within some sort of state relation, especially if there is a state explicitly in their midst. However, this does not rule out the possibility that subjects experience variable degrees of state

³ This can be seen for example in his explanation of enclosure, in which he notes "[...] has meant not so much shifting people from *stateless zones* to *areas of state control* but rather colonizing the periphery itself and transforming it into a fully governed, fiscally fertile zone. [emphasis added] (Scott 2009: 11)

⁴ Mitchell notes, "The distinction [between state and society] must be taken not as the boundary between two discrete entities but as a line drawn internally within the network of institutional mechanisms through which a social and political order is maintained" (Mitchell 1991: 78).

⁵ Foucault's idea of *statification* is that "the state is not universal nor in itself an autonomous source of power. The state is nothing else but the effect, the profile, the mobile shape of a perpetual statification (etatisation) or statifications, in the sense of incessant transactions which modify, or move, or drastically change, or insidiously shift sources of finance, modes of investment, decision-making centers, forms and types of control, relationships between local powers, the central authority, and so on. In short, the state has no heart, as we well know, but not just in the sense that it has no feelings, either good or bad, but it has no heart in the sense that it has no interior. The state is nothing else but the mobile effect of a regime of multiple governmentalities." (Foucault 2008: 77)

entanglement with different portions of the state's apparatus, ranging from subjects embedded deeply in a multiplicity of state-constructing relations to those who are only aware that 'the state' exists somewhere far off and are minimally affected by it. So, although I agree that it is now difficult to find subjects who are completely outside power and state space, there are those who position themselves against the power of the state or stand in spaces of counterpower and sometimes in systems of dual power (Graeber 2004: 24). As a group, the Hmong I discuss here are certainly not free of state relations;⁶ however, in their search for an autonomous livelihood, they flee one portion of 'the state' through appeals to other portions of the state.

Constructing WTK Hmong as Zomian Anarchists

I begin by telling a bit about the WTK Hmong. The people I discuss in this paper are in the large group (by some estimates more than 40,000 but at least 13,000) that made its home at Wat Tham Krabok Temple in the 1990s (Lor 2009: 8), before Thai authorities sent most of them to third countries after 2004. Though I am still over-essentializing an enormous, diverse group, I should say that aside from the obvious point that this group was primarily composed of Hmong from northern Laos that ended up at WTK,⁷ the group of WTK Hmong was varied—consisting of former military and civilians, along with their families, both Chao Fa and Neo Hom, both Green and White Hmong, followers of 'traditional' Animist Hmong religions, those who followed newer forms (particularly Shong Lue Yangism), and some Christians. Nevertheless, these Hmong were categorically 'minorities.' Most in the group had no Thai citizenship, and were ethnically foreign to the Thai mainstream, often speaking little Thai—a position in some ways similar to the one they held in Laos in relation to the Lao majority ethnicity. Most important here, I believe, is to note that many of the Hmong who came to WTK had experienced a similar set of conditions from the 1960s onward. I argue that they gained an increasingly strong sense of Hmong ethnic identity at the same time that they were experiencing tremendous cultural and social change and deterritorialization.⁸ All of this occurred within one generation after the commencement of the Second Indochina War.

In this paper I argue that this group of Lao Hmong came from a heritage of counterpower, but this is not necessarily what defined their political subjectivity. Rather, this group comes from a line of ancestors that experienced deterritorialization and exile over hundreds of years that is similar to their own war experience, giving rise to a cultural intertwinement of Chinese persecution narratives that retain some relevance today. However, this is not to say that the Hmong challenge to heteronomous authority is an expression of some timeless ethnic characteristic, as the "Hmong means free" idea might suggest. Rather, taking a decentered approach to analyzing this attitude reveals

⁶ Some might argue however that the Hmong 'tribal' segmentary social system inhibits autochthonous state formation, giving way to the acephalous social systems and traditions of counterpower noted by Graeber (2004), following Pierre Clastres.

⁷ These Hmong were primarily from Xieng Khouang, Houaphan, Xanyabouli, and Vientiane provinces.

⁸ *Deterritorialization* is a term coined by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1972). I use it here in the sense that anthropologists commonly use it to mean the separation of a people from a location and localized cultural practices. I also use *reterritorialization* to describe the act connected to a desire to reconnect cultural practice with location.

that the anarchist tendencies often attributed to “the Hmong” are socially constructed in real time and could be reversible amid differing sets of historic contingencies (though they are internalized elements of Hmong culture and collective memory).

After fleeing military suppression in China at the hands of the Chinese state military during the great Miao rebellion in Guizhou 1855–1872, many of their ancestors crossed from northern Vietnam into northern Laos throughout the 19th century (Tapp 1989: 18). Most of these Hmong lived in the mountainous regions of Laos near the border with Vietnam. As shifting cultivators, they were dispersed across the mountains in small settlements of only a few families (usually much smaller than in lowland villages) (Grandstaff 1976; Cooper 1984). As such, along the lines of Scott’s escape agriculture thesis, they were difficult to bring into ‘state space’ because their livelihood strategies were shifting and more illegible than was true for sedentary paddy rice cultivators. During the early years of their passage into Laos, state interaction was limited. However, by the early 1900s, the French colonial administration reached into Hmong villages asking for rent and *corvée*. The ethnic Dai (Tai) middlemen sent by colonial authorities became the victims of the Madman’s War (1918–1922), led by Hmong messianic prophet Pa Chai Vue (Paj Cai Vwj) (Stuart-Fox 1997: 39–40). Following this and other related episodes, the French colonial administration made efforts to improve relations with the Hmong in the Xieng Khouang area and began appointing prominent Hmong men as government officials. Though many Hmong began moving to lowland areas after the selection of Touby Lyfoung (the period’s most prominent Hmong leader) as deputy governor of Xieng Khouang Province in 1947, a majority of Hmong continued to live in the mountains, away from heavier Lao state intervention (Yang 1993: 90), until the commencement of the Indochina Wars.

War and Enacting Deterritorialization

The war was the first step toward WTK Hmong deterritorialization. Hmong livelihood patterns changed drastically during the Second Indochina War (1961–1975) and then changed again during the post-war insurgency, which has continued from 1975 to the present (though it is now reduced to a handful of fighters). Hmong people moved from the lands they had lived on for a century and were alienated from livelihood practices and corresponding cultural constructions they had formed there. In this historical moment just prior to the war, most Hmong people in northern Laos tended to engage in more subsistence-oriented livelihoods that consisted of shifting fields of dry rice and corn, vegetable gardens, hunting, forest gathering, and pastoralism.⁹ Although Hmong men and women usually conducted agricultural activities together, this system of livelihood was otherwise divided along gender lines; with men clearing swiddens, building houses, hunting, and tending large livestock (oxen and some buffalo), and women tending gardens and small livestock, weeding, making clothes, and doing other forms of reproductive labor (Yang 1993, Lee 2005). Yang notes that after 1947, some Hmong began moving to the lowlands and became more engaged in market economies,

⁹ Robert Cooper has argued that the growth of opium in northern Thailand as a commercial crop led to an increasing sedentarization of Hmong settlement, an increase in the population density of Hmong settlements, and an increase in the authority base of Hmong men over women (1984: 60, 146).

but the key change for our purposes seemed to come when the war began and Hmong people in northern Laos were concentrated to the south of the Plain of Jars around towns like Long Cheng and Sam Thong (Yang 1993: 93). Here, their access to agricultural and grazing land became more restricted, though not completely precluded. Former livelihood practices persisted to some degree but were replaced with the advent of a wartime economy in which the families of Hmong soldiers in the Royal Lao Army (RLA) increasingly depended on wage payments to purchase supplies that were airdropped from outside the immediate area.¹⁰

In terms of gendered livelihood practices, the wartime economy did not seem to challenge 'traditional' Hmong gender hierarchies. A portion of subsistence livelihood remained, but the Hmong were increasingly involved in military conflict, changing the normative acts of male livelihood duty from agrarian tasks or hunting to military employment. Though duties were altered, the male Hmong position as primary breadwinner continued, maintaining him as "the roots" (Symonds 2004: 9, 31) of Hmong society. Although many Hmong involved in the war had moved from their upland locations and its constellations of livelihood practice, this deterritorialization did not destabilize the male position in family and societal hierarchies. However, after the official defeat in 1975, this group of Hmong fled Laos to take up residence in refugee camps in Thailand where gender hierarchies faced legitimate challenges.

Refugee Camp Life and Realizing Deterritorialization

The weight of cultural deterritorialization was increasingly realized by many Hmong while living in refugee camps in Thailand from around 1978 to 1994. At the camps, some Hmong men continued military activities in the form of insurgency that played out across the border. Such activities, now without official backing, provided neither the prestige nor the pay of past military employment. Hmong refugees were supplied with food and necessities by aid organizations. However, this often proved insufficient to make ends meet comfortably. In refugee camps there was no land for the practice of subsistence agriculture. Also, camp occupants were restricted from leaving and finding work elsewhere when they were in their latter years of camp residence. This led to a new prominence for the 'traditional' duties of women. Hmong women supplemented family income and diets through gardening and embroidery. Some men even began to embroider. It goes without saying, Hmong men's awkward participation in a traditionally feminized task signaled a quaking legitimacy of Hmong gender hierarchies. If they had not already, it was at this moment that many in this group of Hmong, especially men, would have felt the pangs of deterritorialization from pre-war life in Laos and pined for livelihood practices that met cultural expectations.

Acknowledging Cultural Subjectivities

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Hmong refugees were coming to a stronger realization of their ethnic identity just as they grasped the cultural significance of their deterritorialization from their Lao homeland. Both realizations came largely through war

¹⁰ Also, Alfred McCoy (2003) argues that opium production gained prominence, especially at this time.

and refugee camp experiences. Hjorleifur Jonsson (2009) charted the ontogeny of stronger ethnic identity among the Lu Mien. For him, the ethnic identity of Lu Mien rightists solidified as they were collectively associated with the authority of military leaders and the corresponding agendas of militarized life. Though this argument might easily be extended to cover Hmong wartime ethnic ontogeny under General Vang Pao, I argue that the collective association and geographic proximity of Hmong, one with another, was already enough to strengthen a collective ethnic identity. During the war, Hmong settlement changed from a broad dispersion across the hills to a tight concentration in the military towns. At Long Cheng and Sam Thong, they were organized and socialized with their coethnics and a variety of others, including Khmu, Lu Mien and Americans. This gathering continued after exile when Hmong continued to live, observe, and interact with one another in closed quarters. Here, a new flowering of Hmong culture took place as Hmong created new cultural forms and institutions, precipitating what Tapp has called a “reformation of culture” (1989: 180–193).

One strong example of this flowering of Hmong ethnic identity came in the form of the religious innovations created by the *Koom Haum Hmoob* or *Koom Haum Haum Xeeb* organization at the Ban Vinai Refugee camp. Many among this religious group had previous ties to Shong Lue Yang’s restorationist religious movement (see Smalley 1990). At the official Ban Vinai refugee camp in Loei Province, the movement sought to restore and disseminate the true version of Hmong culture and practices. In so doing, the group cast Hmong identity against the backdrop of other ethnic identities. Bits and pieces of Thai-Buddhist, American, Christian and Chinese iconography, religious practice and dress were appropriated and hybridized with Hmong elements. It appears the *Koom Haum Haum Xeeb* members referenced what they found in other groups to come to a stronger realization of their own identity (Anderson 1998). In so doing, they readjusted Hmong religious life to make the Hmong one great ethnicity among the others with which they were hybridized. I was assured by one of the group’s founders that this ‘new way’ (*kev cai tshiab* in Hmong) was conceived of and practiced in order to help the Hmong live with and love all other ethnicities and peoples. In this fluorescence of Hmong culture, we see not only a reaffirming of Hmong group identity but a noticeable readjustment to new circumstances. Implicit to this readjustment are the changes that these Hmong people experienced in the course of their rapid deterritorialization from pre-war life in Laos. Against this backdrop, the Hmong were looking for an alternative space of reterritorialization. Wat Tham Krabok temple (WTK) in Saraburi Thailand was such a space.

WTK as an Alternative State Space

First, it should be understood that WTK was not an official refugee camp. The Hmong that came to live there were not Thai citizens and had no ostensible legal right to live and work in Thailand, but they had some underlying support. As the Chatchai Choonhavan government moved toward rapprochement with the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Thailand found it necessary to end its support of Hmong and other rightist insurgents based at refugee camps along the Thai-Lao border (Long 1992; Hillmer 2009: 278; Baird 2012). So, although Thailand’s government once supported and aided these efforts, it began substantively turning its back on them by the late 1980s, a change

concurrent with refugee camp closure. By 1992, Hmong left the camps in large numbers and many made their way to third countries (including the United States, France, Canada and Australia), and others were repatriated to Laos. A third contingent remained in Thailand in need of a new place to settle. Although some recall being encouraged by Thai authorities to blend in with Hmong populations in northern Thailand, many in this group lacked family or a means of settlement in the north. Instead, thousands of them made their way to WTK, begging the question of how a concentrated community of thousands of undocumented Lao Hmong refugees was allowed to make a home in central Thailand for more than a decade. After all, WTK is in the center of Thailand's central plain (a little over an hour from Bangkok), an area where Hmong people and other highlanders had not lived, especially in such large numbers.

I will explain in the next section that this seemingly unexpected move was facilitated by a complex set of conditions that opened up a grey area in Thai State space for WTK's unorthodox functioning and made WTK a place Hmong people could settle in large numbers in the 1990s. As an institution, WTK appeared in some ways to act counter to any ostensible requirements of 'the' state. Actually, WTK seemed to be using its connections with important state-level actors to gain autonomy through its interfaces with 'the' local Thai state. This arrangement was facilitated by a combination of WTK's political connections with superior actors in the state—including leaders in Thailand's Internal Security Operations Command, military, police and royal family (see Baird 2013 for a full explanation)—and a complex set of contextual features—legal, social, historical and cultural—at the local level. WTK's network of connections thus allowed it to inhabit a gap in Thai state space that was consequently open for WTK Hmong to fill, thus affording this large group of undocumented Lao Hmong some livelihood autonomy in Thailand.

There were several important features in this arrangement. First, WTK has had connections with Hmong people since around the time the temple was founded. Second, because Chamroon Parnchand, WTK's leader for three decades (1970–1999), was politically connected and held international prestige, he was able to use his prestige and connections to hold off local Thai police and government intervention in 'his' space. Third, WTK, as an unorthodox Buddhist institution, is less connected with and influenced by its immediate geographic community. Fourth, due to a unique turn of historical events and legal conditions, it appears that WTK's land tenure is both precarious (in *de jure* terms) and firm (in *de facto* terms¹¹), allowing WTK to settle Hmong there with less interference from local state organizations than would be expected otherwise.

During the first few years following the founding of WTK as a Buddhist institution it began a drug rehabilitation program. According Chamroon, who led WTK after his Aunt Mian Parnchand died in 1970, the first few patients (ethnic Thais) willfully requested WTK assistance to quit opium after the Sarit Thanarat government ended the legal opium monopoly in 1959 (Baird 2013: 127, Pasuk and Baker 1995: 279). This initiated a steady stream of patients entering WTK, both voluntarily and by force, for a tough course of drug

¹¹ Because WTK has not yet attained official "temple" status in the eyes of the Sangha National Council, it is not officially allowed to take land donations. However, due to the unofficial donations of several faithful disciples of WTK leaders, the temple has amassed significant land holdings. Such unofficial donations remain in the donor's name but have been given over to WTK for use.

rehabilitation, which the temple continues to offer at no cost today. Among the varied ethnicities of patients at the temple, some Hmong began coming in the early 1960s. It remains unclear how this connection was initiated,¹² but a significant number of Hmong from northern Thailand came to the temple, strengthening the Hmong connection to WTK. From this early period, a special bond between the leader and founder of WTK, Mian Parnchand (known generally in Thai as ‘Luang Por Yai’), and the Hmong became apparent. By 1968, two years before her death, Luang Por Yai prophesied that a large number of Hmong would come to live on WTK’s grounds (Baird 2013: 133). This prophecy is widely remembered among the monks at WTK. Surely, for WTK monks, the difficult task of taking on thousands of Hmong refugees became more bearable because of the respect that they had for the memory of Luang Por Yai.

The Hmong relocation did not, however, hinge simply on the monks of the temple accepting their guests. Broader geopolitical conditions could open or close the temple doors to the Hmong. The temple’s second leader, Chamroon, had important political connections and prestige that made Hmong settlement at WTK possible. To the enhancement of his broad political reputation, Chamroon was the winner of Asia’s Ramon Magsaysay award in 1975. This award, which he won for his opium rehabilitation efforts, gave him a moral prestige roughly equivalent to the prestige a Nobel Peace Prize recipient. However, it was Chamroon’s less public connections that were probably more politically effective, namely his association with former Police Commander Phao Siyanon and membership in Thailand’s secret police (*Santiban* in Thai). Chamroon worked for Phao in the 1950s, prior to the 1957 coup led by Phao’s political rival, Sarit Thanarat, which took Phibun Songkhram out of power, dislodged Phao, and sent him into exile (Baird 2013). These awards and affiliations provided Chamroon the respect of local and national authorities including police and military.

As Phao’s associate, Chamroon was a member of the police commander’s select Atsawin Waen Phet group¹³ (Thanakon n.d.: 3). This connection led him to foster powerful friends and powerful enemies, but sometimes these became one and the same. Interestingly, Sarit Thanarat, Thailand’s Prime Minister (1958–1963) and nemesis of Chamroon’s former boss Phao Siyanon¹⁴ (Baker and Pasuk 2009: 148) became a supporter of Chamroon’s drug rehabilitation efforts, to which he donated large amounts of money through Air Marshall Thawi Chunlasap (Thanakon n.d.: 20) to buy land and build facilities at WTK. During the 1970s, Chamroon was connected with Internal

¹² Several stories have been circulated among the Hmong in Thailand that the founding abbot called the Hmong “her people” and that she shared many special connections with the Hmong, including possibly promising them help in a past life or being herself a Hmong in a past life. Thai monks at the temple tell different stories, some of which discount the supernatural connections between Luang Por Yai and the Hmong and others that confirm them (for a fuller explanation, see Baird 2013 and Chambers 2013).

¹³ In his influential work *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, historian Alfred McCoy explains that before the closing of Thailand’s opium monopoly, Phao Siyanon and his rival Sarit Thanarat were heavily involved in the opium trade. Phao and Sarit made efforts to conceal this by cracking down on opium in central Thailand while they continued to engage in the trade in the north via KMT-brokered opium grown by Hmong and other hill groups. Furthermore, McCoy calls the Atsawin Waen Phet Phao’s personal hit men. If accurate, such a categorization adumbrates Chamroon’s possible connections with the Hmong even prior to the founding of WTK.

¹⁴ It was possibly the Sarit coup that drove Chamroon to take sanctuary in the monkhood in 1957 (Baird 2013: 125)

Security Operations Command (ISOC) leader Special Colonel Sutsai Hatsadin, who assisted in securing the movements of Hmong insurgents from refugee camps to WTK before they headed to combat or training (see Baird 2013: 137). Reflecting Tyrell Haberkorn's (2011) chapter, this history conforms with ISOC's history of going beyond legal and judicial boundaries to accomplish its purposes. Also, the King of Thailand's older sister, Princess Galyani Vaddhana, visited Chamroon to ask him to dedicate his efforts to getting at the root of the upland opium problem, requesting that he help stop upland minority opium production by targeting the Hmong for rehabilitation (Baird 2013: 136). Several prominent rightist figures had strong ties with the temple.¹⁵ Most notably, Somkhuan Harikul—founder of the Village Scouts—was a member of the Wat Tham Krabok Foundation and made multiple visits to the temple (Baird 2013: 131).

Understanding Chamroon's connections with Thailand's Ministry of Interior (*Krasuang Mahatthai* in Thai) is also particularly important to understanding his assistance with Lao Hmong livelihood pursuits and political autonomy. Early in the days of Hmong settlement at WTK, Chamroon was able to issue cards to new arrivals that noted their status as WTK residents. These had only WTK's seal stamped on them and could claim no other authority. I was told by several informants that these cards protected their bearers, for a time, from police harassment, allowing them to travel in the area and look for work. Although they were all ostensibly there for drug rehabilitation, the reality was much more complicated. In the late 1990s, however, it became necessary for Chamroon to commission one monk named Luang Ta Ert to create new identification cards for WTK's Hmong residents. These cards sported the Phraphutthabat's district insignia and noted that they were issued by the Ministry of Interior's Department of Provincial Administration (*krom kanpokkhrong* in Thai). One WTK monk and several Hmong informants called these "yellow cards." The monk further stated that Luang Ta Ert had high-level bureaucratic connections and was possibly brought on as a WTK monk for the sole purpose of helping the Hmong resettle in more permanent locations in the North (particularly Tak Province). After examining one such card presented to me by a former Lao Hmong resident of WTK, I realized that rather than listing Xieng Khouang in Laos, the card erroneously listed Thailand's Tak Province as the card holder's place of birth (or *Phumi lamnao* in Thai). This was a convenient mistake, and likely not the only one of its kind, particularly since the monk informant mentioned earlier believed Luang Ta Ert had encouraged many Hmong to leave WTK in the late 1990s and early 2000s and resettle in Tak to blend in with the Hmong population there. In this way, some Lao Hmong gained Thai citizenship.

These connections and prestige were also very important to the prospects for safety and an autonomous livelihood for Hmong looking for work in the area surrounding WTK. According to one retired Army general who oversaw intelligence gathering in the Saraburi area, WTK under Chamroon's watch was "a land unto itself," with very little encroachment from local authorities such as police and military. Because the Hmong lived under the constant specter of forced repatriation to Laos and the uncertainty of a life that would follow such a fate, they were deeply grateful for the protection that Chamroon's connections and prestige allowed them in the WTK space. However, the power of those connections did not end at the temple border. The aforementioned

¹⁵ Baird (2013) gives a longer list that includes rightists such as the Buddhist monk Phra Kittivuddho.

documentation¹⁶—in the form of house registration and identification cards—allowed WTK Hmong to travel in Thailand outside of the temple looking for work and reducing their fear of being arrested, forcibly repatriated to Laos, or extorted for cash. Compared to Hmong life in refugee camps like Ban Vinai, where Hmong were restricted from leaving for work, Hmong at WTK had relative freedom to leave and find work. Furthermore, WTK’s documentation, though legally invalid or somewhat specious, had the power to protect the Hmong from police harassment while outside temple grounds.

And, although WTK likely had the support of powerful actors at the national government level, the temple is isolated from the surrounding local community, which includes two small Thai villages—Sap Cha-om and Thai Phatthana—bordering WTK (in the Khao Prong Prap valley where both the villages and the temple are located) and Phra Phutthabat township five kilometers away, outside of the valley. Although Thai temples are commonly also community centers, WTK was not as beholden to the will of the surrounding community had the villagers been averse to Hmong settlement in their midst.

This isolation had a lot to do with WTK as an unorthodox Buddhist institution. As mentioned, WTK was founded by three members of the Parnchand family: Mian, Chamroon, and Charoen. Interestingly, Mian Parnchand, more commonly known as Luang Por Yai, Aunt of Chamroon and Charoen, was the first leader of the group. In Thailand, orthodox interpretations of Theravada doctrine do not allow for the ordination of women to monk or bhikku status. But Aunt Mian Parnchand led the temple from 1957 until her death in 1970, acting as a self-ordained bhikku and establishing herself as a manifestation of “Lokkutara” (a genderless being that had manifested itself before as some of the great religious leaders of the world and had taught the Buddha in his past lives). WTK bases its doctrine and practices on the teachings of Luang Por Yai, some of which include the utilization of different prayer books (or *bot suat* in Thai), abstinence from vehicular conveyance of any kind (automobiles, bicycles, etc.), eating only one meal daily, engaging in agriculture, and going on yearly *thudong* or long walks. Initially, WTK monks made connections with the community through daily alms gathering; however, when the successful drug-rehabilitation program pushed the number of monks at WTK past one hundred, their daily alms gathering became a burden on surrounding villages. Because WTK monks abstain from riding in wheeled vehicles and are generally busy with agricultural and construction projects, it would have taken too long for them to make daily walks to Phra Phutthabat Township to collect alms. As a result, WTK leadership decided to build a kitchen and cafeteria and feed their monks on donations made by a few wealthy donors who brought in food, rather than going out to collect it. This internalization of food provision effectively ended daily contact between monks and outside community members. Even if the surrounding community would have accepted WTK’s unorthodox Buddhism, the two groups thus shared little mutual influence or connection due to geography and the constraints of foot travel. The limited influence of the immediate community might have given WTK wider license to settle Hmong on their land.

¹⁶ Manop “Piak” Parnchand, a relative of Chamroon, was in charge of creating house registrations for the WTK registry. Luang Ta Ert, who apparently had high-level connections, worked to issue the identification cards from the Ministry of the Interior.

Of course, Hmong settlement at WTK could not have happened without the underlying allowance of high-level state actors and state involvement (as adumbrated in the discussion of Chamroon's prestige and connections). A discussion of WTK *territoriality*¹⁷ is also helpful, however, for understanding how a large group of Lao Hmong people lacking Thai citizenship status were ostensibly allowed to evade local state attention and settle for more than a decade only an hour away from the Thai Capital. The territoriality explanation for Hmong settlement at WTK helps us to understand some mechanisms, aside from and possibly derivative of Chamroon's political connections, which legitimated local—ecclesiastical and secular—state agents' benign neglect to enforce citizenship rules against this enormous group of Hmong. WTK's peculiar territoriality has to do with the temple's official legal status. Colloquially, Wat Tham Krabok is called a "*wat*" (Thai for "temple") and fulfills many of the same functions of a temple. However, in the books of the *Therasamakhom*¹⁸ (the ecclesiastical arm of Thailand's government known in English as the *Sangha National Council*), WTK is listed one tier below temple status as a temporary monk's residence (or *Samnak Song* in Thai) and allotted corresponding legal rights and privileges. In an effort to solidify his leadership authority through his official backing of the *Therasamakhom*, WTK's current abbot Boonsong Tanajaro has renewed efforts to gain official temple status, thereby staving off challenges to his authority in WTK space by rival factions. However, the reluctance of local government and religious leaders¹⁹ to approve this unorthodox institution as an official temple has made WTK's transition to temple status a protracted process. As of July 2012, WTK's petition awaited final approval, so the abbot's policy was still not subject to the close and direct *Therasamakhom* enforcement and influence that might have prevented Hmong settlement.

However, during the period of the first three abbots, from 1957 to 2008, the temple's lack of legal support and legitimacy did not stop this 'monk's residence' from acting like a 'temple' that controls its own land. Accordingly, from 1957 to the present, WTK leaders, particularly Chamroon, have worked to increase the span of land they control, from a tiny area at the foot of Tham Krabok Mountain to a swath of 300 rai or 48 hectares that stretches out along the foot of the mountains encircling Khao Prong Prap Valley. Although WTK leaders have de facto control of this space, they do not officially own the land. As a monk's residence, WTK cannot take legal title over donated land in the name of the Sangha, as law compels official temples to do. As such, any land donated to WTK stays in the name of the private donor but is unofficially handed over to WTK to be used as the monk's residence sees fit. Because the donors, as wealthy religious students of prominent WTK monks, have no intention of retracting their informal land donations, WTK has gained de facto control of 48 hectares of land without direct legal ownership or the backing of the Sangha. Though unintentional, this diffusion of official ownership

¹⁷ According to Robert Sack, *territoriality* is the socially constructed control that someone has over an area of territory. Sack notes that territoriality usually involves three key features: some sort of boundary, which is made clear through signals and symbols, a set of rules for governing those boundaries, and the enforcement by consequence at the breaching of those set boundaries (Sack 1985: 33).

¹⁸ The Sangha National Council is a government institution that is responsible for regulating Buddhist institutions in Thailand.

¹⁹ This includes Sangha and secular leaders at the level of the province and district.

rights to several donors rather than a single temple authority directly overseen by Therasamakhom authorities seems to have opened a legal grey area, which may have kept the issue of Therasamakhom control of WTK land out of the purview of local authorities and allowed for the process of Hmong settlement. Arguments about government interference aside, this donation strategy allowed WTK to get control of enough land to offer thousands of Hmong refugees a place to settle.

In the previous section, I provided a historical context for the articulation of the Hmong in WTK space, noting the cultural and historical luggage they brought with them on their journey to WTK. I have also shown some aspects the configuration of WTK as an institution in relation to some state structures, and how this made a space for the Hmong to enter. In the following section I demonstrate how this relationship between the Hmong and WTK authorities played out once the Hmong came to WTK. This particular instantiation shows how historical context and libertarian subjectivity have influenced Hmong resistance to WTK authority.

Hmong Subordination at WTK

The preceding section highlighted some aspects of WTK's particular configuration in relation to the Thai state and the Lao Hmong people who came to live at the temple. I now shift to discuss specifically how the Lao Hmong articulated themselves on the landscape of WTK and how this articulation was in subordination to WTK authority.

Though several Lao Hmong families (including Chao Fa leaders) had been living at WTK since the late 1970s, thousands of Hmong leaving with the closure of refugee camps in northern Thailand hesitated to go to a third country and began moving to WTK around 1992. This movement was likely facilitated by state factions and Chamroon's rehabilitation program, which had already taken many Thai Hmong, providing a tenuously credible cover for Lao Hmong settlers. However, that some interviewees had been encouraged by Thai officials to stay in the north and blend in with Hmong there (as many did at that time and have done since) indicates the Hmong had some choice as to whether they would stay at WTK or go elsewhere. In contrast to the refugee camps, WTK documentation allowed Hmong to come and go much more freely, making it possible to exit once they arrived, but they continued to come and stay by the thousands, to build houses, and to find work in and around the temple. Many interviewees continue to relish their memory of this plentiful season in the mid-1990s, recalling WTK's auspicious geomantic positioning and their hope for continued prosperity there (see Chambers 2013).

Despite these ostensible benefits, there were drawbacks to life at the temple for the Hmong who lived there. Although they were able to subvert some aspects of Thai state hierarchy based on the negotiated form of citizenship that WTK's documentation provided, WTK as an institution also subordinated the Hmong in its own space. Most notably, Hmong people were managed and controlled by WTK temple authorities in their access to space, land and resources. WTK Hmong residences were divided geographically into four groups, each with a leader who was to report to Chamroon daily. Through this hierarchy, Chamroon sent out orders, which included rules on the regulation of land use, labor agreements with outside contractors, and even ritual practices (i.e., restricting the slaughter of cattle for funerals), to WTK's burgeoning Hmong population. In some ways

this structure of power relations resembled a rational state (a mini-WTK state), adding to the idea that WTK occupied a fold in Thailand's state space. As I will explain in the next section, even in the position in which the Hmong found themselves, they found ways to resist unwanted regulation and gain access to land and resources. This resistance involved the appropriation and hybridization of WTK symbols and placing those symbols on previously restricted landscapes in order to gain access to them.

Hmong at WTK were spatially subordinated, occupying a spot below temple authorities and other Thais there. Although WTK's land holdings were large, Chamroon's territorial preference only allowed Hmong to settle WTK space in particular sections of land at particular times. From the abbot's point of view, this would have made settlement orderly and legible (Scott 1998). But in practice, the regulation created a crowded mass of slum-like bamboo dwellings on one section of land while other available sections of WTK land lay empty. It should be noted that Hmong people attach geomantic significance to the positioning of their homes and do not prefer crowding. Perhaps more significantly, WTK Hmong were sent spatial messages through the segregation of the Hmong village from other more strictly Thai or Buddhist spaces on WTK grounds. Within the bounds of space controlled by WTK, the sections of land on which the Hmong were allowed to settle were as far away from the inner WTK temple complex and the Thai village as possible. As the more distant parcels of land filled, it appears that necessity allowed Hmong settlement to inch closer to these Thai spaces. Still, WTK Hmong were not generally allowed to make their homes in the sturdy, comfortable homes built by the temple for Thai lay people in the temple's Thai village.

Furthermore, WTK Hmong were not allowed access to land for agriculture. As most WTK Hmong (especially members of the older generation) had practiced more subsistence-oriented forms of livelihood prior to the war, there appears to have been a strong desire among many of them to have land to produce their own living. Temple authorities initially prevented the Hmong from having access to agricultural land. This would have been especially frustrating to them since the temple controlled a fair amount of land on the floor of Khao Prong Prap Valley that, though somewhat rocky, was good agricultural land and was ringed by a horseshoe-shaped mountain range containing several small valleys which the Hmong could have amply utilized. According to notions and narratives that peg the Hmong as upland forest destroyers (Delang 2002:484), Chamroon set a rule for WTK Hmong that prohibited them from clearing any new land (in the mountains) for agriculture. They were allowed access only to mountain land that had already been cleared by Thais (who were apparently permitted such modifications). However, in around 1992, the only land that had been cleared was still in use by Thai farmers from the local area. As such, some interviewees who came to WTK in those early years recounted bitterly that they had no access to land unless local Thai farmers allowed it (though the situation later improved).

Similarly, in the years of Hmong life at WTK before Charoen Parnchand, who was Chamroon's younger brother and WTK's abbot from 1999 to 2008, built WTK's water system,²⁰ the Hmong had limited access to water. Because there is no natural body of

²⁰ In the late 1990s, Charoen built a series of water towers that distributed water throughout the Hmong village. This must have made Hmong life at WTK drastically more convenient. However, because the Hmong began

water in the valley, inhabitants of the WTK area have depended on manmade wells and ponds to meet their water needs. WTK's 'large pond' (*bor yai* in Thai) provides water for temple use. For a time, the only source of water for the Hmong that did not require payment was the large pond, but the temple controlled this source. Hmong were made to wait their turn in a lengthy queue that stretched up the road and into the neighboring Thai village. Furthermore, if the temple did not want to allow access, it was their prerogative not to do so. Aside from the large pond, a number of Thais dug wells from which they pumped water for sale to Hmong customers until several Hmong families gained enough capital to drill their own wells. Apparently, these Thai-owned establishments also required lengthy wait times and charged a fee.

Hmong Resistance and Reterritorialization

Having discussed some forms of Hmong subordination at WTK, I turn to and question the Hmong reaction. Though this section discusses Hmong resistance to subordination and reterritorialization, I should first note that it is wrong to assume that all, or even a majority, of the Hmong at WTK were driven toward resistance or active subversion. Such a sterile, mechanistic thesis (that the Hmong necessarily perceived their position of subordination and inevitably resisted) minimizes the variety of WTK Hmong perspectives, rigidifies fluctuating/varied social relations, places actors in neat ethnically marked containers, and fails to acknowledge the balancing act that many Hmong faced as they evaluated and interacted with their Thai Buddhist patrons. Nevertheless, many Hmong perceived that they were subordinated at WTK and sought ways to overcome this relationship. Though elements of this attitude might simply reflect the long line of generic cultural narratives that place the Hmong in subordination to majority lowland ethnic groups, several interviewees recounted the subordination they perceived the Hmong faced specifically at WTK. The majority of interviewees recalled oppression more obliquely. Their evaluation of WTK usually came as praise for Chamroon's benevolence, but at the same time, they made peripheral mention of the slights and hardships they faced at WTK.

This bipolarity hints that the Hmong were balancing their relationship with WTK authorities. Though some acknowledged inequity, direct resistance would have been difficult. WTK Hmong had to choose between remaining hierarchically disadvantaged—lacking secure and convenient access to some basic resources—on the one hand and biting the hand of the patron that allowed them to feed themselves on the other. As such, the Hmong attempted to answer this conundrum by soft-handedly negotiating for resource access by naming spaces and resources after Luang Por Yai and thus appealing to cultural meanings valued by the Hmong and Thai community at WTK. In perpetuating place and resource names after the revered teacher, the Hmong re-evoked her acknowledged affinity for their group and her institution's presumed commitment to Hmong welfare. It is doubtful that most WTK Hmong kept this specific instrumentality explicitly in mind; however, the habitual/mundane circulation of such place names among the Hmong and monk community continually reaffirmed the general authority of

leaving WTK in 2004-2005, the system was used less than a decade before it was abandoned and it has now fallen into disuse.

the WTK monk hierarchy, while discursively subverting inequities between Thai and Hmong inhabitants of WTK. This manipulation of meaning attached to natural resource landscapes allowed the Hmong more secure access to these resources. The act simultaneously facilitated incremental reterritorializing of Hmong space against the dominance of Thai authority at WTK. So, although these Hmong were very clearly confined within a network of power, they were acting counter to it. Just as they had escaped the control of localized Thai state strictures on undocumented inhabitants of Thailand, in taking Luang Por Yai's name and symbols and placing them on the landscape of WTK, they were now making an effort to escape the strictures of WTK authorities, gain a more autonomous livelihood and claim points of reterritorialization of Hmong identity in their immediate environs.

For example, although the WTK Hmong were not allowed to clear land and were initially denied access to land cleared by Thais in the early post-1992 years, once the Thai mango farmer who had cleared some upland fields in the mountains surrounding WTK left his land to fallow, a significant number of Hmong began approaching the land and using it for gardening and agriculture. As One Thai monk told me proudly, the Hmong began calling this area "Luang Por Yai's Valley." In using this appellation, the Hmong affirmed that WTK authority remained generally ascendant, but simultaneously reminded the current temple leaders that WTK's revered spiritual leader promised to help the Hmong and probably would not mind their use of the land. Thus, according to both Thai monks and lay Hmong, by the mid-1990s it was commonplace and acceptable for the Hmong to spend time in the mountains surrounding WTK, accessing the mountain land for livelihood supplementation and exploration.

As discussed earlier, insecure and inconvenient water access pushed WTK Hmong to drill their own wells. As one would imagine, however, the drilling and maintenance of these wells was expensive and time consuming. A natural spring located halfway up the mountain trail to a mountain valley provided an alternative. However, WTK Hmong were initially denied access to the spring by a Thai claimant. Once old age forced this farmer to reduce his own visits, WTK Hmong increased their use of the spring, eventually dominating use of the source and forming long lines up the mountain to collect daily supplies of water. They dubbed the spring "Luang Por Yai's" water (*Dej Niam Loos Meb* in Hmong), thus solidifying their access to this natural resource in a similarly 'authority-affirming' manipulation of meaning like that used in accessing "Luang Por Yai's Valley."

A third example illustrates how WTK Hmong were able to reterritorialize Hmong identity even in spaces that held religious utility and meaning to WTK's Thai Buddhist authorities. In his zealous affinity for central Thai folk Buddhism, Charoen Parnchand had often led a group of monks to a large flat stone outcropping to recite prayers on the 15th day of the lunar month. According to a monk that had accompanied Charoen on such outings, Charoen believed the outcropping was a sacred place, containing several large footprints of Lokkutara²¹ and the Buddha. After the Hmong settled in WTK, their houses surrounded this stone area (known as the *lan hin* in Thai). Though Hmong people are

²¹ As mentioned earlier, Aunt Mian taught that she was the manifestation of Lokkutara. As understood by monks at the temple, Lokkutara is a physical manifestation of the universe. This being has come in the form of important religious figures, including Jesus Christ. Most notably, Lokkutara was the teacher of Buddha during several of his incarnations.

traditionally animist and shamanist, the significance of the stone area and its supernatural artifacts were not lost on the Hmong. Although it has since been demolished and worn by weather, a group of Hmong prophetesses (*pog saub* in Hmong) built a temple on the site to honor Luang Por Yai, whom this group and most other WTK Hmong have declared was Hmong in a past life and is the sacred Hmong ancestor *Niam Nkauj Ntsuab* (companion to the Hmong man *Txiv Nraug Nab*). Using the bare stone as floor and foundation, these religionists constructed a four-walled shrine. At one end they burned incense and paid obeisance to a pair of cement statues—a Hmong woman and man in full traditional apparel (presumably *Niam Nkauj Ntsuab* and *Txiv Nraug Nab*)—that remain intact in the crumbled temple. An impressive pair of semi-supinely positioned cobras stretch out along the base of the wall and gaze back at the Hmong couple sitting at the meeting point of their serpentine tails. Though it had once been something of a Thai pilgrimage site, this space had become Hmong. One Hmong informant even recalls being sent away from the temple because she was not wearing traditional Hmong clothes, as required by the *pog saub* that ran the temple. Though the space had become their own, these Hmong prophetesses did not forget Luang Por Yai's mark on the land. A Hmong informant claimed that the prophetesses worshipped Luang Por Yai and believed that the water that settled in two prominent natural basins in the stone floor was Luang Por Yai's water. In a discussion of this site that I witnessed in 2012, one of the few remaining Hmong residents of WTK consoled a Thai monk who lamented the Hmong's enclosing of Luang Por Yai and the Buddha's footprints. Comparing the significance of the Buddha's footprint to Thai Buddhists with Hmong reverence for Luang Por Yai, the Hmong man assured the monk that the site was as sacred to the Hmong as it was to the Thais because it contained *Niam Loos Meb's* (Luang Por Yai in Hmong) footprints. Because many WTK Hmong have identified *Niam Loos Meb* as one of their ancestors (*Niam Nkauj Ntsuab*), this statement shows once again that Luang Por Yai's persona acted as a channel for Hmong spatial reterritorialization and subversion of presumed power relations.

Conclusion

My argument is not that the Hmong described here are by some genetic make-up or inherent cultural value libertarian or anarchic people; rather, I contend that this subjectivity, where it is found, is influenced by a complex set of historical factors. The WTK Hmong came to flee and subvert power out of a sense of survival and culturally identified indignation. After being violently and involuntarily deterritorialized from what many Hmong now view as a choice and idyllic life in Laos, many WTK Hmong have sought to regain portions of that lifestyle. However, as undocumented residents living in political exile in Thailand, they were forced to make do with less. In this process, they came to a stronger conceptualization of their group's cultural identity and its deterritorialization from a homeland (especially in terms of livelihood practices). This moment of existential realization came to the Hmong, and they met it with intelligence and ability. After leaving a legally enforced subliminal stage of livelihood at the refugee camps, these Hmong sought out a liminal space of autonomy. The first moment of reterritorializing their autonomous livelihood came at WTK, where a complex of connections surrounding the temple allowed the Hmong to find a space of livelihood autonomy on and off temple grounds. Their prudently executed challenge to the WTK hierarchy allowed some WTK

Hmong a limited and momentary reterritorialization of livelihood and cultural space. Although abstracting an ahistorical snapshot from this trajectory presents the Hmong as inherently autonomous people, it could be that most groups would share a similar trait if they had passed through a similar historical experience.

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The Story of Lao *r*: Filling in the Gaps¹

Garry W. Davis²

1. Overview

This paper addresses the history of the grapheme³ (letter) **ᨾ** in the Lao language, and the disappearance of the sound that **ᨾ** originally represented—the phoneme *r*. The issue is that the graphemes of a writing system do not always represent the phonemes (distinctive sounds) of a language in a straightforward manner. In Lao, the problem was further compounded when the writing system did not keep pace with subsequent changes in pronunciation for reasons that will be examined below.⁴ Since scholars of Lao studies are generally more familiar with the modern aspects of this problem, I first describe the current use of two graphemes, **ᨾ** and **ᨿ**, to write one and the same phoneme: *l*.⁵ I then examine how the loss of *r* is inextricably linked to the phonemes *h* and *l* because *r* long ago became *h* under certain conditions and *l* elsewhere, and because *r* and *l* were both eventually lost in consonant clusters. Finally, I examine how loan borrowings from other languages such as Pali-Sanskrit,⁶ Khmer, and Thai fit into these developments. I will show that **ᨾ**'s tremendous resilience over the centuries explains why it is now so difficult to unravel the history of *r*'s disappearance from the Lao phonological system.

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³ A grapheme is a unit in a writing system, not the sound that the unit represents. Thus the [f]-sound in a word like *fan* is spelled with an <f>, but the same sound is also spelled <ph> in *phone*. By convention, graphemes are written between wedge brackets (e.g., <**ᨾ**>). Phonemes, on the other hand, are distinctive sounds in a language, meaning they contrast with other sounds. Thus, in English, /l/ and /r/ are distinctive because they contrast in minimal pairs such as *rip* and *lip*. Phonemes are traditionally written between slanted brackets (e.g., /r/). To enhance readability, however, wedge brackets will be used here to enclose the Romanized transcriptions of Lao graphemes (such as **ᨾ** <*r*>). Otherwise, I dispense with wedge and slanted brackets except where they help to prevent misunderstandings, and transcribe Lao words phonemically using the same system as Kerr (1972). When referring to the particular phonetics of a sound, I place it within square brackets (e.g., [r]). An asterisk (*) indicates a phoneme that is posited for an earlier stage of the language. A sentence such as *r* > *h* should be read as: “*r* changed into *h*.” A hyphen (e.g., *r*-) indicates that the preceding consonant or cluster stands at the beginning of a word or syllable. Finally, all words used as linguistic examples are italicized.

⁴ Of course, English is rife with examples of antiquated spellings of this sort as in homophones like *write* and *right* where the (“silent”) letters *w*, *-e*, and *gh* once represented sounds, but no longer do.

⁵ When it is necessary to differentiate between the two Lao graphemes for /l/, I use the traditional mnemonics **ᨾ** “lǎo lot” ‘car’ and **ᨿ** “lǎo líng” ‘monkey.’ The same practice holds for **ᨾ** “hǎo húan” and **ᨿ** “hǎo haan,” which both represent /h/, but whenever possible I follow the common practice in spoken Lao and dispense with the mnemonics.

⁶ I use the term Pali-Sanskrit here to refer to Sanskrit words that entered Lao via the later stage of spoken Sanskrit known as Pali, which was the major source of loan words associated with Buddhism.

This paper owes much to Enfield (1999) who was able to show that *r* is no longer a phoneme in spoken Lao, and that it exists in the language nowadays only in a marginal and artificial way. I pick up where Enfield left off by fully describing where *r* was lost, and by showing that these developments were by and large common linguistic changes. In later sections of the paper, I identify gaps that remain in our knowledge of the loss of *r*, and suggest that similar developments in Thai may shed light on these gaps. Finally, I discuss a few cases in which spoken Thai has brought about an alternative pronunciation in a number of monosyllabic Lao words so that doublets now exist, one with initial *l*- and the other with initial *h*-.

I conclude that *Ṣ*'s long graphemic survival obscured the loss of *r* in the spoken language, and that the retention of the grapheme *Ṣ* was largely motivated by the same kinds of cultural and historical factors and the same kind of influence from Thai that are making *Ṣ*'s modern resurgence possible. It is hoped that the present discussion will assist future researchers as they continue to study the development of the Lao phonological system during the period when the modern language was emerging amid internal change and external influence.

2. A Resilient Grapheme

Few topics in Lao linguistics have excited so much discussion in recent years as the resurgence of the grapheme *Ṣ* (Kamalanavin 2003). In fact, the subject has been treated so thoroughly by Enfield and others that I need only provide a brief overview here. Currently, *Ṣ* leads something of a dual life. When it is used within the context of Buddhist writings, *Ṣ* transcribes the [r]-sound that occurred in words of Pali- Sanskrit origin,⁷ and in such cases—as others have reported—Buddhist monks can sometimes conjure up a (presumably pedantic) pronunciation of this grapheme as [r]. Observers agree (Enfield 1999: 289, note 8), however, that such uses are marked, or exceptional, and are triggered by the desire to pronounce these words in an authentic (Pali-Sanskrit) manner. Then, too, the specter of the grapheme *Ṣ* has been noted of late in some Lao surnames, at least with regard to the Romanized version of the name. Enfield (1999: 273) cites one surname (phonemically best rendered as *vólakhũn*) that was earlier transliterated as <Volakhoun>, but is now again Romanized as <Vorakhoun> so as to reflect its etymological spelling with *Ṣ*. And Lew (2013) notes the recent return of etymological spellings of this sort, even in official Lao government publications, where loan borrowings such as *radar* are again transliterated using *Ṣ*. At the other end of the spectrum, many Thai loan words have penetrated the youth scene in Vientiane (Enfield 1999: 283) and some young people can now be heard pronouncing an [r] in a few words, such as *farəŋ* 'Westerner,' which can presumably be attributed to the heavy influence of

⁷ The large number of loan borrowings from Pali-Sanskrit has created the popular misconception that the Lao language itself derives from these languages. The traditional practice of transcribing Pali-Sanskrit words into Lao in a one-to-one fashion accounts in part for the complexity of the traditional Lao writing system (and that of Thai). It is the reduction of this complexity that post-1975 reforms to spelling hoped to achieve.

the ever-present Thai media.⁸ In these interesting cases [r] replaces the [l] (*falan*) that we expect in modern Lao pronunciation given the linguistic developments to be discussed in detail below.

The modern situation described above is particularly ironic because for decades, if not centuries, the [r]-sound has been, and remains, exceedingly rare in the Lao language. In fact, Enfield (1999: 271) notes that modern attempts to do away with the grapheme *ᨾ* date back at least to the mid-1950s, when revolutionary groups operating in parts of Laos made it a point of general policy to substitute *ᨿ* for *ᨾ* everywhere in their publications in words such as *falan* ‘Westerner,’ *àamélikàa* ‘America,’ and *latthabàan* ‘government.’ This substitution and many other graphemic simplifications became mandatory after the Pathet Lao came to power in 1975 and embarked on an effort to increase literacy in the country in part via orthographic reforms that yielded an almost one-to-one correspondence of graphemes to phonemes.⁹

To the extent that *ᨾ* has returned to usage, it again represents the phoneme *l* in the same contexts as it did prior to the post-1975 reforms, though it has probably not regained the wider currency it once enjoyed. Thus, *ᨾ* (lɔ́ lot) and *ᨿ* (lɔ́ líng) are both once again used to write the phoneme *l* in the same way that *f* and *ph* are both used to write the phoneme *f* in English, with the choice of grapheme depending on the history of the individual word. I now turn to what is known of the phonemes *r* and *l* in the history of Lao.

3. Writing Systems and Historical Sound Change

Lao and Thai are closely related languages that descend from Proto-Tai via the intermediate stage of Proto-Southwestern Tai (henceforth PSWT). Since comparative evidence leaves no doubt that the phonemes **r* and **l* existed in the language at that point, the period immediately following PSWT serves as the starting point for our discussion of the history of these sounds in Lao.¹⁰ While Standard Thai (also known as Central Siamese) continues to distinguish both these phonemes—at least in the upper registers of speech and in writing—*r* in Lao underwent significant changes early on.

The writing systems of Thai and Lao derive from a South Indian writing system (Devanagari) of the Grantha type (Diller 1996: 458–9). The intermediary was likely a form of Old Khmer or Mon script that later became the direct source of both the Tham Lanna and the Lanna Fakkham scripts associated with the Sukhothai Kingdom of north-central Thailand. It is thought that both of these closely related scripts spread to the Mekong River basin from the Sukhothai Kingdom, but the details are sketchy, as is the

⁸ I wish to thank Charles Zuckerman (oral communication) who reports a similar use of [r] by young people in Luang Phrabang, including Thai terms such as *ríap róoi* ‘tidy,’ *antàraai* ‘dangerous,’ and *àròi* ‘good tasting.’

⁹ There were notable exceptions to this principle, however. The grapheme *ᨾ* (ᨾ) was likewise retained after the spelling reforms as a placeholder in syllable-initial position (*ᨾᨿ* ‘read’) even though it has no sound value in this context. See Ivarsson (2008) for a discussion of the controversy surrounding the standardization of Lao orthography.

¹⁰ The language family that Lao and Thai belong to is called ‘Tai’ (not ‘Thai’). Scholars (Pittayaporn 2009, Li 1977: 117) agree that the consonant clusters *pr-* and *tr-* cannot, strictly speaking, be reconstructed for PSWT, but that they must have entered the language in loan borrowings soon thereafter because Thai and Lao share close cognates with these clusters.

possible influence of the Burmese writing tradition on these scripts. It is known, however, that by about 1500 CE, they had given rise to the Lao Tham and Lao Laic writing traditions (Kourilsky per literas and forthcoming). The Tham (dharmic script) system was used primarily in religious writings and remains in use in Lao monasteries today (Enfield 1999: 259). The Laic style was more commonly used for secular sorts of writing and provided the most direct input into the modern Lao script. Much of what we know about early writing in Laos comes from Gagneux's (1983) study of Lao stone inscriptions dating from the 15th through the early 19th centuries,¹¹ and his comparison of individual graphemes in multiple inscriptions is particularly important to the question at hand.

Figure 1 (below) is an abbreviated reproduction of Gagneux's grapheme data showing the script characters ຣ, ລ, ຫ (<r l h>) and the cluster ຫລ (<hl>) recorded with both their Tham and Laic variants. The first attestation of the character ຣ (hóo huan) <h> dates to 1559, and it is attested only in the Laic system. The emergence of ຣ in the writing

	ຣ	ຣ	ລ	ລ	ຮ	ຫ	ຫ	ຫລ	ຫລ
	<r>	<r>	<l>	<l>	<h>	<h>	<h>	<hl>	<hl>
CE	T	L	T	L	L	T	L	T	L
1491	ຣ		ລ			ຫ			
1534 1538	ຣ					ຫ		ຫລ	
1541									
1551							ຮ		
1559 1566	ຣ		ລ		ຮ	ຮ		ຫລ	
1582 1586		ຣ		ລ	ຮ		ຫ		ຫລ
1603		ຣ	ລ	ລ	ຮ	ຫ	ຫ		ຫລ

Figure 1: Development of the characters ຣ, ລ, ຮ, ຫ, ຫລ <r, l, h, h, hl> from 1491–1603 CE (adapted from Gagneux 1983: 88–90). Script characters from Tham sources are listed under “T,” Laic characters under “L.” Most characters are attested in both traditions with variations in both.

¹¹ Recent work by Lorrillard (2005, 2009) builds on Gagneux's work and incorporates data from palm-leaf manuscripts. The preservation and analysis of early Lao manuscripts continues apace and promises to add much to our knowledge of Lao historical phonology. The Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts (DLLM) project is among the leaders in this area (<http://laomanuscripts.net/en/bibliography>).

system appears to coincide with the well-known change of $*r > h$ that occurred in early Lao ($*rao > hao$ ‘we,’ $*rak > hak$ ‘love’) and in closely related northern Thai varieties (Gedney 1966:22).¹² Hóo huan’s attestation in only the Laic tradition is consistent with the interpretation that it arose as a way to write a sound that had previously been pronounced as [r] but now was pronounced as [h]. Its absence from the more conservative Tham script is predictable because the more traditional system would likely continue to favor traditional spellings over new ones even if the new ones better reflected current pronunciation.

The grapheme ᨾ (hóo huan) is similar to ᨾ (lót) in appearance, and it is used exclusively to write the [h]-sound that developed via the change of r to h , but not the inherited h that is traditionally written as ᨾ (hóo haan). Thus, even though both [h]-sounds have long since merged into a single phoneme, they continue to be written with different graphemes due to their distinct historical origins. Gagneux (1983: 80) points out that $\text{ᨾ} <r>$ and $\text{ᨾ} <h>$ co-occur in the older inscriptions, and he adds that the “opposition of ‘R/h’ is almost never noted except for a few cases where ᨾ is written in as a subscript or as a superscript.” In fact, however, the parallel occurrence of both graphemes is consistent with our expectations of how writers of early Lao would have adapted to the change of $*r > h$. In conservative (often religious) writings in the Tham style, writers may have ignored the change altogether. In less formal contexts, they may have followed their instincts to write the [h]-sound that they were pronouncing. They may also have later corrected themselves or been corrected by their overseers by inserting the character ᨾ above or below the new $<h>$ grapheme.

To summarize, the way the original r was written in early Lao inscriptions suggests that it had come to be pronounced consistently as [h] in word-initial position, and writing conventions were starting to reflect that change by about 1550. As it turns out, the change of $r > h$ is not uncommon in the languages of the world and even occurs in some dialects of Brazilian Portuguese (Blust 1983). Similar changes have also been reported for the Vietic language Thavung (Hayes 1982) as well as the modern Khmer dialect of Phnom Penh (Pisitpanporn 1994: 106). The motivation for a change of r to h may be that r was pronounced with a good deal of aspiration (and was trilled) (Li 1977: 142, Court 1996). If the articulation of the highly aspirated [r]-sound weakened (lenited) slightly, it would have sounded acoustically similar to the aspiration of an [h]-sound,¹³ resulting in a merger of r with the already extant phoneme h .

¹² As in modern Lao, I assume that r and l could not occur in the syllable coda (end of a syllable), and that clusters of $h + l$ had already simplified to just l , or were well on their way to doing so. The stubborn retention of silent $<h>$ in the orthographic cluster $<hl>$ may be due to its usefulness in marking the tone on the following vowel (which was indeed originally triggered by the h sound that was once pronounced there).

¹³ A trilled r is articulated with the tongue slightly raised and held in place so that the airstream causes it to vibrate continuously. The airflow is stronger and longer than for a tap because a tap is a momentary event. Trilled r ’s often become voiceless, which brings them phonetically closer to an h . Modern phonological theories now often describe the change of word-initial $r > h$ (as in the Lao examples above) as a type of debuccalization (O’Brien 2012: 15); that is, a weakening in which the sound loses its original place of articulation in the oral cavity to become an [h].

4. Lao Pronunciation of <r> in the Early 20th Century

As pointed out above, the Lao graphemic system's slow pace of change serves to obscure historical developments that took place in the language, and the lack of philological research until recent times has limited the sources at our disposal to trace and date such changes. However, two dictionaries compiled by French missionaries, Cuaz's (1904) *Lexion Français-Laocien* and Guignard's (1912) *Dictionnaire Laotien-Français*, provide vital clues to the pronunciation of Lao at the beginning of the 20th century. Both dictionaries list all entries in both Lao script and in Romanization, and we are thus not dependent on the Lao spellings alone to determine how Lao was pronounced. Compilers of both dictionaries were in agreement that the [r]-sound already had no reality in the Lao language at the time of their writing. Both dictionaries Romanize the grapheme **ᨾ** as the letter <l>, suggesting that words spelled with **ᨾ** were probably always pronounced with an [l]-sound in normal speech. Cuaz even notes overtly that the [r]-pronunciation sometimes associated with the grapheme **ᨾ** was just a conservative tradition. These descriptions make clear that by the early 20th century there was no phonological distinction between the [l]-sound in words spelled with **ᨾ** and those spelled with **ᨾ**.¹⁴

To put this change into linguistic perspective, we note that the merger of *r* and *l* is actually a common change both in Southeast Asia and cross-linguistically, because these sounds are both liquid (highly sonorous) consonants that are phonetically similar. In the earlier stages of the Polynesian language family, for example, *r* and *l* were apparently distinct phonemes. In some of the daughter languages they merged into an [l]-like phoneme while in others, like Maori, they merged to become [r]-like. Sometimes, as in modern Japanese, the result of the merger of *r* and *l* is a single phoneme that is [r]-like in some environments but [l]-like in others. Finally, we see an ongoing merger of *l* and *r* to *l* in spoken Thai varieties that is similar to the Lao development.

Tracing the loss of *r* in consonant clusters, however, is less straightforward. Cuaz's (1904) Lao dictionary itemized specific sound changes that characterized the difference between Thai and Lao pronunciation. Among these changes were the developments in clusters of the type *C(h)l*- and *C(h)r*- that were inherited by both languages and were retained in Thai (*phr*-, *phl*-, *kh*-, *kr*-), but reduced to single consonants *C(h)*-¹⁵ in Lao. Despite the absence of *r* and *l* in these clusters in the Lao pronunciation of his day, Cuaz noted that the conservative orthographic practice of the time still favored placing an orthographic remnant, or trace grapheme, underneath a consonant where an etymological *r* or *l* had at some point been lost from the cluster. (See Figure 2 below.)

¹⁴ In some cases, Guignard appears to decide between a Lao spelling with **ᨾ** or **ᨾ** based on the tone of the following vowel. This leads to the use of **ᨾ** in some words where it never occurred historically (because the *l* in these words derived from PSWT *l*, not *r*). He thus spells <róm> 'wind' and <róᨾᨾ> 'to try' instead of <lóm> and <lóᨾᨾ>. Such cases of etymological misidentification are apt to happen when writers try to draw a distinction between *r* and *l* that no longer exists.

¹⁵ For simplicity's sake I use *C* throughout as an abbreviation for any unaspirated voiceless stop consonant (such as *p*, *t*, *k*) and *Ch*- for any aspirated voiceless stop (such as *ph*, *kh*, *th*) since aspiration is a distinctive feature. *C(h)*- here represents any voiceless stop, whether or not it is aspirated.

The clusters *tr-* and *pr-* are both preserved in Standard Thai, and the parallel existence of cognates suggests that these clusters once existed in unreduced form in Lao as well. They deserve special scrutiny because they were not inherited via PSWT but rather ended up in both languages as loan borrowings from either Khmer or Pali-Sanskrit. The borrowed cluster *pr-* follows the pattern of the native clusters by deleting -*r-* and becoming simply *p-* (Thai *pratùu*, Lao *patùu* ‘door’). The cluster *tr-* on the other hand, remained unchanged in Standard Thai but became *k-* in Lao (cf. Thai *triiam* ‘to prepare’ and *tron* ‘straight’ versus Lao *kǎ-kiam* ‘to prepare’ and *kòŋ (pài)* ‘(go) straight.’) The change of *tr-* to *k-* seems to have initiated in Thai as well, but stalled early on (Beebe 1979: 14), leaving behind traces mostly in the Thai royal language and in northern Thai and Isaan (Lao) dialects where *tr-* becomes *k-* in the Lao manner (Katsura 1969). Once again, it is difficult to establish the chronology or intermediate stages of this development. It is possible that *r* was lost from the cluster followed by the direct change of *t* to *k*, that is: **tr-* > **t-* > *k-*. The development of *t* > *k* is known from the history of Hawaiian, for example. In that case, *k* had already been lost due to a previous change, and the pronunciation of *t* then came to vary allophonically between *t* and *k*. Crucially, though, Kingkham (2007: 26) reports some Thai dialects that appear to show a development of *tr-* directly to *kr-*. Thus, chances favor a change of *tr-* > *kr-* > *k-* in Lao and in the Thai varieties where this change also occurred. Finally, I note that the reduction of clusters like those discussed here is motivated by a common cross-linguistic tendency to reduce complexity in the onsets of syllables. This strong tendency has been discussed extensively in the literature and was formulated by Vennemann (1988: 13–21) as the (Syllable) Head Law. Here again, we see that the changes that Lao has undergone are cross-linguistically common.

6. More about *r*’s Loss

There remains the important question of exactly how and when *r* was lost from the Lao phonological system. PSWT was a monosyllabic language, meaning that—with the exception of compounds—words would have consisted of a single syllable. We know that monosyllabic Khmer words like **rim* ‘edge, shore’ and **rap* ‘to receive’ that contained an initial [r]-sound were borrowed into Lao early on, such that they underwent the change of *r* > *h* (Lao *him*, *hap*) alongside native words. Assuming that Lao was still completely monosyllabic at this stage, it follows that all occurrences of *r* had disappeared completely, because *r* did not occur at the end of a word. This, in turn, would suggest that all disyllabic words, such as those in Figure 3, below, must be more recent borrowings.

Modern Lao	Standard Thai	gloss
láakáa	raakaa	price
láwaŋ	ráwaŋ	be careful
kàmlái	kamrai	profit
sāmlăp	samrap	for

Figure 3: Romanized transcriptions of disyllables containing **r* in early French-Lao dictionaries

Traditional thinking thus assumes that disyllabic borrowings from Khmer and Pali-Sanskrit could not have been in the language at an earlier date because, if they had been, words like those in Figure 3 would have necessarily undergone the change of *r* > *h*. Since there was no longer an *r* in Lao after this change, the assumption is that the *r* contained in later loan words would have been reinterpreted upon arrival as an *l*, because at that point it was the closest sound in the language to *r* (Pali-Sanskrit *rôok* ‘disease’ > modern Lao *lôok* (*laa bàat*) ‘epidemic’; Khmer *rawaŋ* > *lawaaŋ* ‘between’). Despite the appeal of this view, there remain some concerns, because it is known that the Tai group had been in contact with speakers of Mon and Khmer (cf. the monosyllabic loan borrowings above) for a long period of time, and these languages had disyllabic words that contained the phoneme *r*.

An alternative theory (Davis 2010) hypothesizes that Lao may have borrowed disyllabic words from Khmer sources earlier than scholars usually assume, and that some of these words contained *r* since it was a common phoneme in the Old Khmer language.¹⁷ An initial [r]-sound in disyllabic words might have been able to avoid the change of *r* > *h* because polysyllabic words in Lao are stressed on the final syllable, meaning that the initial syllable of the word was only weakly stressed. An [r]-sound in that environment might have been less aspirated and less robustly trilled, and would have been less acoustically similar to an [h]-sound. The same allophone would have occurred in word-internal position in disyllabic words (e.g., **sămrăt* ‘succeed’ > *sămlăt*) where *r* was also less aspirated and trilled. What is of interest here is that the less-aspirated allophone of *r* word-initially and word-internally in disyllabic words might have remained unaffected even after the change of *r* > *h* in monosyllables. The phoneme *r* could then have lived on in pronunciation until more monosyllabic and polysyllabic loan words from Khmer and Pali-Sanskrit arrived that contained *r* (*rôok*, *rot*, *rattabàan* > *lôok*, *lot*, *latthabàan*). The advantage of this view is that it can accommodate the possibility that polysyllabic words reached Lao earlier than most scholars think. Furthermore, if *r* continued to be pronounced until a later point in the history of Lao, it could help explain how the use of the grapheme *ᨾ* could persist into the early modern era.

¹⁷ Bauer (1993) has found evidence of early polysyllabic words in Lanna Thai, which is closely related to Lao. The forms in question appear to derive in part from Mon, but it is unclear to what extent they were already part of the spoken language at the time of their attestation.

In either event, it is clear that what was originally an *r* in polysyllabic words in the donor languages eventually emerged as *l* in Lao. Thus, the Standard Thai *r* in these words corresponds to *l* in their modern Lao cognates whereas monosyllabic Lao words have *h* where Thai has *r* (because Thai never underwent the change of *r* > *h*). To illustrate this point again, compare monosyllabic words like **rao* and *háo* ‘we’ and **rǎn* and *hǎn* ‘hot’ with polysyllabic words with original *r* that yielded *l*, such as *lawaan* ‘between’ and *labian* ‘veranda.’

7. Influence and Borrowing

The influence of Thai on the written Lao language was extensive throughout the first half of the 20th century as Laos slowly continued to define itself culturally and linguistically vis-à-vis its western neighbor (Ivarsson 2008: 127-136). But by the 1960s and ‘70s, officials of the Royal Lao government were also known to have commented on and to have debated the obvious Thai influence that was creeping into the spoken Lao language at the time. Examples included the pronunciation of a number of simple words in both everyday life and in the media. A number of these borrowings from the mid- and late 20th century were monosyllabic and contained an initial [l]-sound as in *láo* and *lóon* *léem* in contrast to the Standard Thai forms *rao* ‘we,’ and *róon* *réem* ‘hotel.’ This is probably because *r* and *l* have since merged in most spoken varieties of Thai and, as Enfield (1999: 270)¹⁸ has noted, it is this colloquial pronunciation of Thai for the most part that has been imported into Lao in recent decades. The result is a series of doublets in Lao that now include such common words as *láo* versus *háo* ‘I/we’ and *lóon* *léem* versus *hóon* *héem* ‘hotel.’ The point is that the pronunciation with initial *l*- occurred due to borrowing rather than via an actual sound change. The doublets obscure the regularity of the sound changes outlined above and therefore encourage a certain lack of clarity in phrasebooks and dictionaries of Lao, many of which leave the impression that the sound correspondences between Lao and Thai are haphazard or inconsistent.¹⁹

There may be older examples of such doublets as well. The word *hap* ‘to receive’ in Lao is an early monosyllabic Khmer loan word (*rap*) that underwent the change of *r* > *h*. However, there is also the doublet *lap* that is probably the result of the re-borrowing of this lexeme from Thai into southern Lao (Cuaz 1904: XIII). In this case, the word may have entered the language with an initial *r*- that was immediately interpreted as *l*-, because that would have been the closest available phoneme in Lao at the time. Alternatively, *lap* could have been borrowed from Thai varieties in which *r* had already undergone the colloquial Thai change of *r* > *l*. Either way, the final outcome would have been the same. See Figure 4 below for an overview of the changes discussed in this paper.

¹⁸ An alternative hypothesis is that the donor variety was Standard Thai and that Lao speakers equated this phoneme with *l*, the only liquid in their phonological inventory (cf. similar arguments below and in Section 6). In either case, the result would be the same.

¹⁹ For example, Kerr (1972: 967) states: “*ร* is interchangeable with *ล* and *ส*.”

relationship with the phoneme *r*. Religious and cultural traditions and influence from Laos' powerful neighbor to the west have helped shape Lao pronunciation and graphemics in the past and continue to do so today.

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Lao Khrang and Luang Phrabang Lao: A Comparison of Tonal Systems and Foreign-Accent Rating by Luang Phrabang Judges

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1. Introduction

‘Lao Khrang’ refers to a group of ethnic-Lao citizens of Thailand who were originally from a mountainous area known as Phu Khang in Luang Phrabang² Province, Lao PDR. (Mayuree and Em-On 2005: 5, Chai Nat Chamber of Culture n.d.: 12–13). There are several groups of Lao Khrang (LK)³ in Thailand, each of which migrated at different periods of time, and to different provinces. Currently, the majority of LK people reside in the upper provinces in central and western parts of Thailand such as Phetchabun, Kanchanaburi, Kamphaeng Phet, Chai Nat, Tak, Uthai Thani, Phitsanulok, Ratchaburi, Sukhothai, Uttaradit, Phichit, Nakhon Sawan, Suphan Buri, Nakhon Pathom, and Lop Buri (Mayuree and Em-On 2005: 8). According to Chen (2000: 1) most of the Lao minorities in Thailand came from what are now Luang Phrabang and Vientiane provinces in the Lao Peoples Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), beginning with the reign of King Taksin over 200 years ago. Mayuree and Em-On (2005: 6–7) state that historical documents from the reign of King Buddha Loetla Nabhalai (King Rama II) recorded at least two periods of migration by LK people. One was during the reign of King Taksin in 1778 AD, and the other was in 1791 AD. It has been well documented that the LK people were forced to leave their home town in Luang Phrabang and nearby areas as prisoners of war in both periods. Today, several large communities of LK in Thailand still maintain their ethnic Lao identity through language and culture. In particular, they believe that offering their hand-woven clothes to the spirits of their ancestors will bring them a peaceful life. This form of traditional weaving has always been part of their LK rituals and culture (Srisombut, Chantachon, and Koseyayothin 2011: 595). According to the Chai Nat Chamber of Culture, Ministry of Culture, Thailand (Chai Nat Chamber of Culture n.d.: 1-8), the word ‘Khrang’ probably comes from the name of their homeland. Another explanation is that ‘Khrang’ comes from the word for a particular insect called ‘khrang’ used to produce dye for woven fabric, a traditional handicraft, which has been passed down from generation to generation. Because the LK people apparently came from the area around Luang Phrabang, Laos, I am particularly interested in investigating the tonal systems of these two dialects, LK and Luang Phrabang Lao (LPL),⁴ to determine their linguistic proximity, and to conduct a study of foreign-accent rating to determine their perceptual proximity. The first step was to analyze the LK tonal system spoken in Ban Kut Chok, Nong Mamong District, Chai Nat Province, Thailand, and that of LPL spoken in Ban Xiang Man, Chom Phet district, Luang

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² Throughout this paper, the transliteration from Thai to English will be based on the system implemented by the Royal Institute of Thailand (http://www.royin.go.th/upload/246/FileUpload/416_2157.pdf). Likewise, the transliteration from Lao to English will be based on the same system, except for some alphabetic consonants in Lao that have been conventionally used among Lao people. These are <v> for ວ ວີ /v/, <s> for ສ ເສີອ /s/, and <x> for ຊ ຊື່ງ /s/. There is no /r/ or /l/ within consonant clusters in Lao. But, <Phrabang> will be transliterated instead of <Phabang> following the Royal Institute of Thailand.

³ LK stands for ‘Lao Khrang’. This abbreviation will be used throughout this paper, except when it is mentioned in the sub-headings.

⁴ Henceforth, Luang Phrabang Lao will be referred to as LPL, except when it is part of the sub-headings.

Phrabang Province, Lao PDR. Both tonal systems were compared in terms of their split and merger patterns as well as their phonetic characteristics. Second, LPL speakers were asked to listen to forty sentences uttered by three LK speakers, four LPL speakers, and one Salavan (SLV)⁵ speaker. The purpose of this rating test was to investigate how LPL speakers would rate the LK accent with reference to the degree of native versus non-native accent.

There has been a lot of research on Lao dialects spoken in Thailand that described their tonal systems and place of origin. For example, Tanprasert (2003: 1) studied the tonal systems of Phuan⁶ spoken in Thailand, and indicated that the Phuan people were originally from Xiang Khwang, Laos, though without any further discussion on the relationship between the Phuan groups in Thailand and those of Laos. Likewise, Jinda (1986: 36), Wilailuck (1987: 7), Chen (2000: 1), and Siwaporn (2000: 94) studied the LK tones of different areas in Thailand. All of them stated that the LK people were from Phu Khang in Luang Phrabang, but there was no further investigation of the similarities and differences between these two dialects—LK in Thailand and LPL in Laos. Recently, several research papers have compared the tonal systems of a minority language in Thailand with the language spoken by residents of the dialect's place of origin. For example, Somsonge (2013: 32–38) studied the tonal systems of Tai Dam dialects spoken in Thailand and compared them with those currently spoken in Vietnam. Nevertheless, such comparisons were conducted with a focus only on speech production. Such evidence from acoustic analysis can only provide us with information on the speech production of the two dialects being compared, but it does not give us information about how speakers of one dialect perceive, and are perceived, by others. The second objective of this study is therefore to test the rating of LK speech by LPL listeners, providing preliminary data that reveal how LPL speakers feel about the LK speech accent, given the fact that the two varieties of Lao were assumed to derive from the language spoken by descendants of the same Lao group. The study of both tonal production and perception can enhance our knowledge of linguistic ties between these two speech communities, which have had no contact with each other during two hundred years of physical separation.

2. Literature Review

This review focuses on two aspects of my analysis: the phonology of LK and LPL and foreign-accent rating studies. First, I review previous studies on the consonants, vowels, and tones of LK spoken in different provinces in Thailand, as well as previous studies on the tonal systems of LPL. Second, I will discuss the methodology for rating foreign accents that has been used (mostly) for assessing English, but which is relevant to this research.

2.1. Previous studies on phonology of Lao Khrang and Luang Phrabang Lao

2.1.1. Lao Khrang

Like any Lao dialects, LK, as spoken in different provinces,⁷ (e.g., Tha Tako district, Nakhon Sawan Province (Wilailuck 1987), Don Tum district, Nakhon Prathom Province

⁵ Salavan, henceforth SLV, is a province in Southern Laos. Its adjacent provinces are Savannakhet in the north, Cham Pasak in the south, and Xekong in the southeast.

⁶ Phuan is a group of Tai speakers residing in Xiang Khwang, Lao PDR (Tanprasert 2003: 1). Brown (1985: 143) described it as a dialect genetically close to Shan, Northern Thai, and Central Thai, whereas Chamberlain (1975: 50) classified it to be the same subgroup as, for example, Siamese, Phu Tai, and Neua.

⁷ The place names of the previous studies will be spelled in accordance with the spelling system used in this paper.

(Jinda 1986), Dan Sai district, Loei Province (Siwaporn 2000), and Mueang district, Nakhon Sawan Province (Chen 2000), has twenty consonant phonemes. They are /p,t,k,ʔ,p^h,t^h,k^h,b,d,c,f,s,h,m,n,ɲ,l,w,j/. There are nine short vowels: /i,e,ɛ,u,o,a,ɯ,ɤ,ɔ/ and their nine long-vowel counterparts /i:,e:,ɛ:,u:,o:,a:,ɯ:,ɤ:,ɔ:/, making eighteen vowels all together. Chen (2000: 19) reports that LK lacks /ɯa/; only two diphthongs: /ia/ and /ua/ were found. Similar to Chen's findings, my data indicate that LPL /ɯa/ always corresponds to /ia/ in LK of Ban Kut Chok. For example, LPL /sɯa4/⁸ - LK /sia4/ 'shirt', LPL /mɛ:ɲ2.kaʔ5.bɯa5/ - LK /mɛ:ɲ2.kaʔ3.bia5/ 'butterfly'. Brown (1985: 139) proposed that a proto-diphthong *ɯa has become /ia/ in Lao as spoken in Nan Province as well as other dialects that he did not specify.

LK has five tones emerging from the same syllable structures and proto-Tai tones as specified by Gedney's tone box.⁹ The tone shape and height vary slightly across regions. Table 1 shows a comparison of the tonal systems in different areas in Rows A, B, and C, and Table 2 presents tonal variants in Rows DL and DS:

Five tones	Song Phi Nong district, Suphan Buri (Suwattana and Kantima 1996)	Tha Tako district, Nakhon Sawan (Wilailuck 1987)	Don Tum district, Nakhon Pathom (Jinda 1986)	Sangkha Buri district, Kanchanaburi (Phinnarat 2003)	Na Haeo district, Loei (Siwaporn 2000)
Tone 1 (A1)	High-Falling-Rising /424/	Mid-Falling-Rising /324/	Mid-Falling-Rising /313/	Mid-Falling-Rising /312/, /323/, Low Level-Rising /224/, High-Falling-Rising /423/	Low-Falling-Rising /214/
Tone 2 (A234)	Mid-Rising /34/	Low-Rising-Falling /232/	Low-Rising-Falling /243/, Low-Rising /23/	Low-Rising-Falling /232/, Low-Rising /23/, Mid-Falling-Rising /323/	Mid Level /33/
Tone 3 (B1234)	High Level /44/	High Level /44/	High Level /44/	Mid Level-Falling /332/, Mid-Falling /32/, Mid Level /33/, Low Level /22/	High Level /55/, Mid-Rising /35/
Tone 4 (C1)	High-Rising-Falling /452/	Mid-Rising-Falling (Glottalized) /342ʔ/	Mid-Rising-Falling /343/	Mid-Rising-Falling /354/, /342/, Mid-Rising /35/, High Level-Falling /442/	Low-Falling /21/
Tone 5 (C234)	Mid-Rising-Falling /354/	High-Rising (Glottalized) /45ʔ/	Mid-Rising /345/	High Level-Falling /443/, Mid Level /33/, High Level /44/, Mid-Rising /34/	High-Rising-Falling /453/

Table 1: The five tonemes of LK in different areas based on previous studies.

⁸ The number written after the transcription of each syllable refers to the tone (see Table 5 for LK tonal system and Table 6 for LPL tonal system).

⁹ Gedney's tone box consists of twenty boxes divided by five columns and four rows. The columns represent five proto-tones called Tone *A, *B, *C, *DL, and *DS, while four rows are divided into voiceless friction sounds, voiceless unaspirated stops, glottal, and voiced sounds. The tone box was proposed on the assumption that the Thai writing systems reflect Proto Tai tones *A, *B, *C, and *D (Gedney 1989: 195-196). That is, Proto-Tai Tone *A was written with no tone marker, Mai-Ek tone mark represents Tone *B, while Mai-Tho tone mark represents Tone *C. Tone *D was found in checked syllables with no tone mark. See Gedney (1989) for further details.

Five tones	Song Phi Nong district, Suphan Buri (Suwattana and Kantima 1996)	Tha Tako district, Nakhon Sawan (Wilailuck 1987)	Don Tum district, Nakhon Pathom (Jinda 1986)	Sangkha Buri district, Kanchanaburi (Phinnarat 2003)	Na Haeo district, Loei (Siwaporn 2000)
DL123	Tone 1	Tone 4	Tone 5	Tone 4	Tone 4
DL4	Tone 3	Tone 5	Tone 2	Tone 5	Tone 5
DS123	Tone 4	Tone 1	Tone 1	High Level /44/, High-Falling /43/, /42/, Mid Level /33/	Tone 1
DS4	Tone 5	Tone 3	Tone 3	Mid Level /33/, High Level-Falling /443/, High Level /44/, Mid Level /33/	Mid-Rise /34/

Table 2: The tonal variants of LK in different areas based on previous studies.

As can be seen in Tables 1 and 2 above, four out of five LK varieties show similar tone shapes and pitch height. For example, in Tone 1 (A1), all varieties have a falling-rising shape. In Tone 4, all tone systems except that of the Na Haeo district, Loei have a rising-falling contour although they differ in pitch height. In addition, variations can be seen in Tone 5; rising-falling in Song Phi Nong, Suphan Buri and Na Haeo district, Loei, whereas different tonal variants were found in other regions.

2.1.2. Luang Phrabang Lao

Research studies on Lao spoken in Luang Phrabang are rare. Siwaporn (2000) compared the phonological systems (consonants, vowels, and tones) of a Lao community who called themselves ‘Lao Dan Sai’ in the Na Haeo district, Loei Province, and an LPL variety spoken in Ban Pak Sueang, a small community located on the Thailand-Laos border right next to Loei Province. She found that these two villages both speak Lao dialects which have twenty consonant phonemes. She proposed eighteen monophthongs /i, iː, e, eː, ɛ, ɛː, ɨ, ɨː, ɵ, ɵː, a, aː, u, uː, o, oː, ɔ, ɔː/ and three diphthongs /ia, ia, ua/ (Siwaporn 2000: 47). These phonemes are similar to the other dialects as described in LK. My data, collected in the Mueang district of Luang Phrabang, also show twenty consonants and eighteen monophthongs (nine short vowels and their long-vowel counterparts resembling those proposed by Siwaporn). However, there are four diphthongs: /ia/, /ua/, /ɯa/ and /aɯ/ instead of three. The diphthong /aɯ/ has been preserved from proto *aɯ, which has become /ai/ in most Lao dialects (Brown 1985:141). For example, /baɯ2/ ‘leaf’, /haɯ4/ ‘give’, /caɯ2/ ‘heart’, /naɯ2/ ‘in’, compared with /bai2/, /hai4/, /cai2/, and /nai2/ in other Lao dialects.

In terms of the tonal system, Roffe (1956) proposed five tones as shown in Gedney’s tone box in the following table:





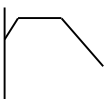





Class	A	B	C	DL	DS
High	Tone 1: Up-Down Glide 		Tone 4: High-Falling (Glottalized) ¹⁰ 	Tone 2: Low 	Tone 4: High-Falling 
Mid	Tone 2: Low-Rising 		Tone 5: High 		
Low				Tone 5: Mid-Rising 	Tone 3: Mid 

Table 3: Five tones in Luang Phrabang proposed by Roffe (1956) (adapted from <http://www.seasite.niu.edu/lao/>)

In Roffe's tone box description, the class of consonants is divided into three categories: High, Mid, and Low, unlike most of the Lao tone boxes described by Thai linguists, which usually comprise four types as in Gedney's Tone Box: one High, two Mids (pre-glottalized and non-preglottalized initials), and one Low category. According to Roffe, Tone 1 in Box High-A is 'Up-Down Glide,' which I interpret as Mid-Falling-Rising according to its tone shape. Tone 2 in Boxes Mid- and Low-A is Low-Rising. Tone 3 in all of column B is Mid Level. Tone 4 in Box High-C is High-Falling with glottalized ending. Last, Tone 5 in Boxes Mid- and Low-C is a High Level tone. The tones in boxes DL and DS are allotones of the main five tones. That is, Tones in Classes High and Mid of column DL are allotones of Tone 2. Box Low-DL is an allotone of Tone 5. Boxes High- and Mid-DS are allotones of Tone 4. Last, Box Low-DS is an allotone of Tone 3.

Ten years after Roffe's proposal, Brown (1965) described the five tones in LPL as indicated in the tone box below:










Class	A	B	C	DL	DS
High	Tone 1: Mid Falling Rising 	Tone 3: Mid 	Tone 4: High-Falling (Glottalized) 		Tone 5: Mid-Rising 
Mid	Tone 2: Low-Rising 		Tone 5: Mid-Rising (Glottalized) 		
Low					Tone 3: Mid 

Table 4: Five tones in Luang Phabang Lao proposed by Brown (1965) (adapted from <http://www.seasite.niu.edu/lao/>)

¹⁰ Neither Roffe (1956) nor Brown (1965) use parentheses for this word (Glottalized) in their Tone Charts in contrast with the chart depicted at www.seasite.niu.edu/lao/ and used here.

Tones in LPL described by Brown were similar to Roffe's, except for Tone 5 in Boxes Mid and Low C; Roffe proposed a High tone while Brown's was a Mid-Rising (Glottalized) tone. In addition, Tone DL in Boxes High and Mid in Roffe's table was a Low tone but High-Falling (Glottalized) in Brown's. Tone DS in Boxes High and Mid in Roffe's was High-Falling but Mid-Rising in Brown's. In addition, Tone DL in Boxes High and Mid in Roffe's has merged with the Low-Rising tone or Tone 2 in Boxes Mid and Low A, but the counterpart tone in Brown's has merged with the High-Falling (Glottalized) tone in Box High-C. My initial finding for the tones of LPL was closer to Brown's, except for Tone 1, which I will explain in detail in Section 4.2.

2.2. Foreign-Accent Rating

Studies of how native speakers of a language rate the foreign accent of non-native speakers of that language have been conducted for over thirty years. Most studies on foreign-accent rating have been done by James Emil Flege or by Flege and his research team. For example, Flege (1984) studied how English native speakers rated the English accent of French speakers. Flege and Fletcher (1992) examined the English accents of native Spanish and Chinese speakers with varied lengths of residence in the United States. Another example of research on foreign-accent rating is from Flege, Frieda, and Nozawa (1997). They conducted a study of Italian speakers' English accents rated by native English speakers. From my observation, it is usually the language accent of English that has been rated, with speech samples collected from non-native English learners from both Europe and Asia. In rating foreign accents, researchers used different kinds of scales for listeners to judge speech samples. One of the most popular scales that has been widely used in such studies is the Likert scale,¹¹ in which one end of the scale indicates 'no foreign accent' while the other end indicates 'extremely/very heavy foreign accent' (Jesney 2004: 2). Jesney (2004: 2–3) explains further that there are no fixed points for Likert scales. That is, the scales could range from three to ten points, depending on how researchers design their methodology. Furthermore, tokens or stimuli provided for listeners can range from one syllable to a speech sample of two minutes, and the type of stimuli can be either reading texts or extemporaneous speech.

These studies tend to focus on Second Language Acquisition (SLA), since the studies in question involve two (or more) different languages. In terms of dialectal studies, on the other hand, the question of whether two speech varieties are different languages or merely dialects of the same language is not always clear-cut. Siegel (2010: 1) has suggested that mutual intelligibility between two varieties is the main criterion used to determine whether two varieties are different languages. That is, if speakers of the two varieties can understand each other to a certain extent, they speak dialects of the same language. If, however, they cannot communicate with each other by using their own language, this means that they do not speak the same language.

Just like foreign-accent rating in SLA, researchers of Second Dialect Acquisition (SDA) are also interested in accent rating between dialects. Rating the accent of different dialects is usually one of several tasks that researchers of dialectology ask their respondents

¹¹ Allen and Seaman (2007) explained that Likert scales are a common rating format for surveys. Respondents are asked to assess how they would rank quality from high to low, least to most, best to worst, or how much they agree or disagree, for instance, using five or seven levels. See Appendix II for the five-point Likert scale used in this research.

to do.¹² Apart from different-accent rating (the degree in which the dialect accent in question resembles one's own), these tasks include correctness rating—the degree to which the dialect accent in question is completely correct/incorrect (Demirci and Kleiner 1999: 263–281, Hartley 1999: 315–332), pleasantness rating—the degree to which the dialect accent in question is pleasant to hear (Demirci and Kleiner 1999: 263–281, Hartley 1999: 315–332, Coupland, Williams, and Garrett 1999: 333–343), dynamism—the degree to which the dialect accent in question is lively (Coupland, Williams, and Garrett 1999: 333–343), and prestige—the degree to which the dialect accent in question is prestigious or well-spoken (Coupland, Williams, and Garrett 1999: 333–343). The purpose of these tasks is to account for language attitudes—how respondents feel or perceive regional/social dialect(s) in question, rather than evaluating their speech accents per se. Although my research involves SDA, since it is a study of a perceived non-local (LK) accent rated by listeners of a different dialect (in this case LPL), a Likert scale, which is widely used in SLA, will be applied here and will be explained in the methodology section.

3. Methodology

The research methodology comprised three steps. First, I collected tonal data from LK informants. Second, the equivalent tonal data were collected from LPL informants. Then a tonal analysis was conducted from the data collected during the first and second steps. Next, LPL informants were asked to rate the degree of nativeness perceived from the utterances of LK speakers. This section is divided into four sub-sections that describe the data collection from both LK and LPL informants, tonal analysis, and foreign-accent rating.

3.1. Data collection from Lao Khrang informants

Informants were four female native speakers of LK, between the ages of 54 and 74, from Ban Kut Chok, Nong Mamong district, Chai Nat Province. They were asked to produce sixty monosyllabic words for recording (see Appendix 1). Each word was shown as a picture on a 4 x 7-inch card. The purpose of eliciting the data in this way was to study the tonal patterns and tone characteristics in citation form. Next, they were asked to produce another set of monosyllabic words beginning with an initial k^h -. These words were: (1) / $k^ha:1$ / 'leg,' (2) / $k^ha:2$ / 'stuck,' (3) / $k^ha:3$ / 'galangal,' (4) / k^haw4 / 'rice,' (5) / $k^ha:5$ / 'trade,' (6) / k^hat3 / 'write,' (7) / k^hat4 / 'scrub,' (8) / $k^ha:t4$ / 'torn,' and (9) / $k^ha:t5$ / 'fasten.'¹³ The informants were asked to say each word twice, providing 18 tokens all together. Nine flash cards representing these words were randomly shown to them twice. The data collection of these nine words helped analyze their acoustic characteristics when the initial consonants as well as the vowels were controlled. The informants' last task was to read five short sentences. These were:

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| (1) / $k^h\text{ɔj}4\text{ mi:}2\text{ ?a:j}5\text{ sɔ:}\eta1\text{ k}^h\text{on}2/$ | 'I have two brothers.' |
| (2) / $k^h\text{ɔj}4\text{ mi:}2\text{ k}^h\text{wa:j}2\text{ sɔ:}\eta1\text{ to:}2/$ | 'I have two buffaloes.' |
| (3) / $na:5\text{ hen}1\text{ k}^h\text{wa:j}2\text{ ha:}4\text{ to:}2/$ | 'Uncle/Aunt saw five buffaloes.' |

¹² For example, Kuiper (2002: 247) asked his native French-speaking judges to rate 24 French dialects using a four-point Likert scale, ranging from Point 1 if you think that French in this region resembles your own, to Point 4 if the French spoken in this region is incomprehensible to you.

¹³ Obviously, this additional set of nine word lists does not cover each of the twenty tone boxes. However, they were adequate for showing the LPL tonal system as a whole, since they cover every type of syllable structure, and each of them is representative of one of the five tones.

- (4) /k^hɔj4 cep4 mtu:2 la:j1/ ‘My hands hurt so bad.’
 (5) /mi:2 ʔa:j5 ha:4 k^hon2/ ‘(I) have five brothers.’

These five utterances were used as sentence stimuli when LPL listeners were asked to rate their accent. Each of these sentences were made up of as many tones as possible, so that judges could hear a wider range of tonal distribution.

3.2. Data collection from Luang Phrabang informants

I had five female native speakers of LPL, between the ages of 42 and 76. They were from Ban Xiang Man, Chom Phet district of Luang Phrabang Province. I have been told by many LPL people, including the residents of Ban Xiang Man themselves, that the people of Ban Xiang Man have had a very limited record of migration. They have lived there for several hundred years, relatively isolated; marriage across provinces or even districts, for example, has been rare. From their point of view, they have lived here for generations.

As with the LK speakers, LPL informants were asked to utter sixty monosyllabic words and a set of words beginning with an initial k^h- consonant, except for the word /k^hat2/ ‘scrub’ and /k^hat3/ ‘write,’ which do not exist in LPL. Arbitrarily, I chose /p^hat2/ ‘put on clothes’ and /nok3/ ‘bird’ to replace them.¹⁴ The informants were also asked to produce the same set of short sentences as controlled sentence stimuli for the rating evaluation.

3.3. Tonal Analysis

The tonal data from all informants were initially measured in Hertz, using the PRAAT 5.3.42 program. The duration was normalized and divided into five points: 0%, 25%, 50%, 75%, and 100%, respectively.¹⁵ The average F0 values were then converted into semitones in order to reduce each speaker’s phonetic variants as well as cross-speaker variation. The formula used for the conversion was $ST = 12 * \log (\text{Hertz to be translated} / \text{Hertz Reference}) / \log(2)$.

¹⁴ I had not expected to find that the words /k^hat2/ ‘scrub’ and /k^hat3/ ‘write’ did not exist in LPL. The acoustic results from the word /p^hat2/ ‘put on clothes’ should not differ much from those of the word /k^hat2/ ‘scrub’ since the initial k^h- and p^h- were both voiceless aspirated plosives differing only in the place of articulation. On the other hand, the word /nok3/ ‘bird’ was obviously not the best candidate as a replacement for /k^hat3/ ‘write,’ since the initial consonants and the vowels were of different categories. It should be noted, therefore, that the pitch patterns of the latter word might deviate from /k^hat3/ ‘write,’ and might affect the reliability of the acoustic analysis even if the starting point of tonal measurement was at the onset of the vowel.

¹⁵ Several Thai scholars, such as Phinnarat (2003), divided the duration of each normalized rime into ten points for tonal measurement. However, Abramson (1962) measured Thai tones in raw curves at every twenty-five milliseconds for ‘rapidly moving stretches’ and at every fifty milliseconds or more for ‘slowly moving stretches and level portions’ (Abramson 1962: 115). The intervals of twenty-five milliseconds were therefore minimally appropriate for tonal measurement from one point to another. Abramson also normalized the raw curves of his tonal data by ‘shrinking or stretching the curves proportionally to a convenient length’ (Abramson 1962: 119). The difference in tonal measurement methodology between Phinnarat and Abramson may be due to the objectives of their tonal analysis. Phinnarat aimed at measuring tone curves of different syllable structure: smooth (i.e., syllables ending with sonorants, long vowels or diphthongs) and checked (i.e., syllables ending with stops), while Abramson investigated tone curves of single vowels and double vowels in Thai, disregarding whether the final consonants ended in sonorants or stops. In this research, the average duration of rimes was no longer than thirty-three milliseconds. When divided into five points, the interval between each and every point was between five to ten milliseconds. Therefore, tonal measurement at five points should be adequate to show the accuracy of the pitch contour of each tone.

To illustrate how each tone was labeled, Figure 1 (below) offers a sample of how a tone would be described:



Figure 1: Sample of Tonal Description

In each tonal figure, there are six horizontal lines, each of which represents the height of the tone ranging from 0–8 semitones at each point of normalized duration.¹⁶ The semitones are then converted into Tone Numbers 1–5, as shown, between each line according to its position. Numbers 1 and 2 would be called Low, Number 3 Mid, and Numbers 4 and 5 High.

Foreign-Accent Rating

Forty-one LPL speakers,¹⁷ all females, acted as judges to rate the speech of LK speakers. They were mostly gardeners and farmers whose education did not go beyond graduating high school. They were between 15 and 80 years old¹⁸ from Ban Muang Kham,¹⁹ Chom Phet district, Luang Phrabang. Because of the wide range of ages, the judges were divided into three groups based on generation: ages 15 to 24 were the young generation (YG), ages 25 to 44 were the middle generation (MG), and ages 45 to 80 were

¹⁶ The range of values for semitones is not fixed, depending on the average ranges within each group of informants. As can be seen from Figures 4 and 5, for example, the semitones range from 0–10.

¹⁷ Originally, forty-two judges participated in the rating. However, one of them was ruled out because her listening ability to rate controlled LPL and SLV sentences was considerably limited. Further explanation is provided in Section 5 and Appendix III regarding the judges.

¹⁸ The reason for having such a wide range of ages was that in such a secluded village as the one where data were collected, it was unpredictable to what extent I could get cooperation from the people. Since it was hard to control the background of the judges, including the age range, I tried to have as many judges as possible in order that the corpus would be adequate for statistical analysis. The youngest judge (15 years old) and the oldest one (80 years old) were qualified judges because they could identify the Luang Phrabang and non-Luang Phrabang accents correctly with high scores.

¹⁹ Ban Muang Kham and Ban Xiang Man, where the tonal data were collected, are practically ‘twin’ villages; they are located right next to each other, within only about ten minutes walking distance.

the old generation (OG).²⁰ None of these respondents had a hearing impairment.²¹ The rating results from the three generation groups were compared and calculated statistically to see if their ratings had any significant differences. The judges were asked to listen to the forty sentence utterances produced by three LK speakers,²² with two sentences or 5.0% of all utterances from one Salavan speaker as control non-native stimuli,²³ and with eight or 20.0% of the total utterances from four LPL speakers as control native stimuli.²⁴ Each sentence was separated by a five-second pause. The judges were unaware of the speakers' language background. Their task was to assess the degree of native to non-native accent of these stimuli by using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from Number 1 "definitely native accent" (written in Lao as "This voice is definitely an LPL speaker") to Number 5 "definitely non-native accent" (written in Lao as "This voice is definitely NOT an LPL speaker"). The five-point scales were adopted based on the backgrounds of the raters. That is, since most of the participants were farmers and gardeners, they were not familiar with the complexity of such a paper task. Too many points might confuse them, leading to unreliable results.²⁵

4. Tonal Analysis of Lao Khrang and Luang Phrabang Lao

Sections 4.1 and 4.2 will briefly describe the tonal analysis. In Section 4.3, the tones of both varieties will be compared.

²⁰ This research was not originally aimed at investigating foreign-accent rating among judges of three different age groups. For this accent-rating section, the objective was to study how LPL listeners as a whole would rate the LK accent in terms of native versus non-native accent. The additional investigation of accent rating divided by age difference was later conducted after I noticed that the results of the accent rating for the LK3 speakers varied among the judges. As a result, the ages of the judges were not controlled, ranging from fifteen to eighty years old consecutively. Although the three age groups (the Younger Generation [YG], the Middle Generation [MG], and the Old Generation [OG]), were divided arbitrarily into groups between 15 and 24, 25 and 44, and 45 and 80 years of age respectively, I believe that this is the best decision for age division for the following reasons: (1) Although the oldest judge and the youngest judge of each group may be considered in the same generation (e.g., the oldest judge of YG was 24 years old while the youngest judge of MG was 26 years old), each group was considerably proportionate in number (15 judges for YG, 17 judges for MG, and 9 judges for OG). Grouping each generation in other ways would result in more imbalanced numbers of judges for each group. Moreover, the division between YG and MG was at 24–25 years, whereas the division between MG and OG was at 44–45 years, but there was no judge whose age was at the border of each group. Therefore, every judge clearly belongs to his/her most appropriate group. (2) It can be seen later in the discussion section that the results of accent rating divided by three different age groups represent a continuum; YG tended to be more 'sensitive' to foreign accent and therefore rated the LK accent as foreign to their ears more than the other two groups. In contrast, OG were less sensitive and tended to accept the LK accent as their own. The rating scores of MG were in the middle. Therefore, I strongly believe that the alternative division of age groups by other age ranges would not alter the results of the analysis.

²¹ I talked to each one of them prior to the rating test, to assure that they had no sign of hearing loss.

²² Although words in citation were collected from four LK speakers, the sentence utterances from only three out of four were used for the foreign-accent rating, due to the fact that the quality of one of the recordings was not good enough to be used for the rating test.

²³ The purpose of including the equivalent utterances from a Salavan speaker is to test whether the judges were skillful enough to realize that this accent clearly belongs to an outsider.

²⁴ Again, words in citation were collected from five LPL speakers, but the sentence utterances from four out of five informants were used as stimuli, due to the low quality of the recording from one of them.

²⁵ (See Appendix 2 for the rating sheet).

4.1. Tones in Lao Khrang

LK of Ban Kut Chok, Chai Nat Province, has five tones on live syllables (i.e., open syllables ending with either a long vowel or a diphthong, or closed syllables ending in sonorants). These are Tone 1: High-Falling-Rising /515/,²⁶ Tone 2: Low-Falling-Rising-Falling /2131/, Tone 3: High-Falling-to-Mid-Level /433/, Tone 4: High Level-Falling /552/, and Tone 5: High-Rising /45/. Tone 3, Tone 4, and Tone 5 were found on the dead syllables (the ones ending with a final stop). The following tone box in Table 5 shows each tone with its occurrence on each syllable type; Boxes A, B, and C are either open syllables ending with a long vowel or a diphthong or closed syllables ending with either a nasal consonant or a sonorant (/m, n, ŋ, j, w/). Boxes DL are long-checked syllables: those with a long vowel and a final stop sound (/p, t, k, or ʔ/). Boxes DS are short-checked syllables: those with a short vowel and a final stop sound (/p, t, k, or ʔ/).

	A	B	C	DL	DS
1	Tone1 High-Falling- Rising /515/	Tone 3 High-Falling- to-Mid-level /433/	Tone 4 High Level-Falling /552/	Tone 4 Mid Level- Falling [442]	Tone 4 [21] Low-Falling
2	Tone 2 Low-Falling- Rising-Falling /2131/		Tone 5 High-Rising /45/		
3					
4				Tone 5 Low- Rising [23]	Tone 3 Low Level [22]

Table 5: Five tones in LK according to its split and merger pattern from my analysis

The pitch shape in DL123 was closer to Tone 4 of C1, except that its height was slightly lower. The tone in DS123 may have been borrowed from Central Thai tones, as words in these boxes were assigned Low-Falling tone, which is a phonetic variant of the Low tone in Thai. Because of its falling curve in DS123, this tone was viewed as an allotone of Tone 4.²⁷ On the other hand, the tone of DL4 was considered an allotone of Tone 5 because they both had rising curve at the offset, although the tone height of C234 and DL4 were different. The tone shape and height, discussed here, can be observed in Figures 2 and 3, below.

Figure 2 shows the pitch contours of all LK five tones on live syllables of the same structure: /k^ha:/ (except for Tone 4: /k^haw/) below:

²⁶ The tone letters of each tone were based on the tonal realization in Figures 2 and 3, where semitones were divided into six lines representing five levels from 1 (the lowest) to 5 (the highest). The number of the tone letters depends on the complexity of each contour. For example, a falling contour was simply described with two letters, while a falling-rising tone requires three letters. On the other hand, four letters were used for the falling-rising-falling tone.

²⁷ Although one may argue that if the tone of DS123 is a variant of Tone 4, it might as well be a variant of Tone 3 since the latter also exhibits falling contour. My view of treating DS123 tone as an allotone of Tone 4 derives from the fact that the falling contour of both tones was at the offset, not the onset as evidenced in Tone 3.

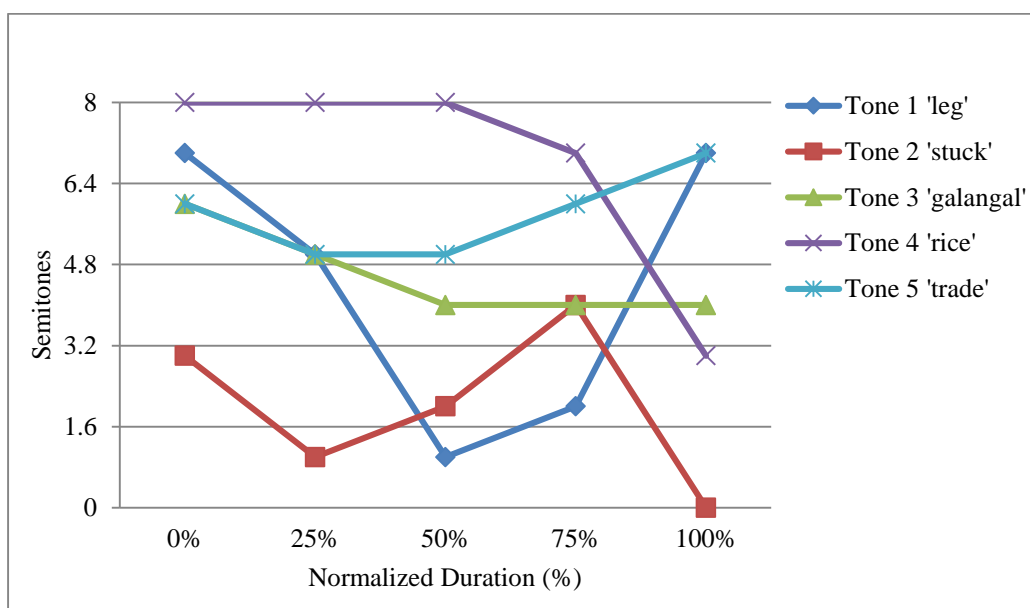
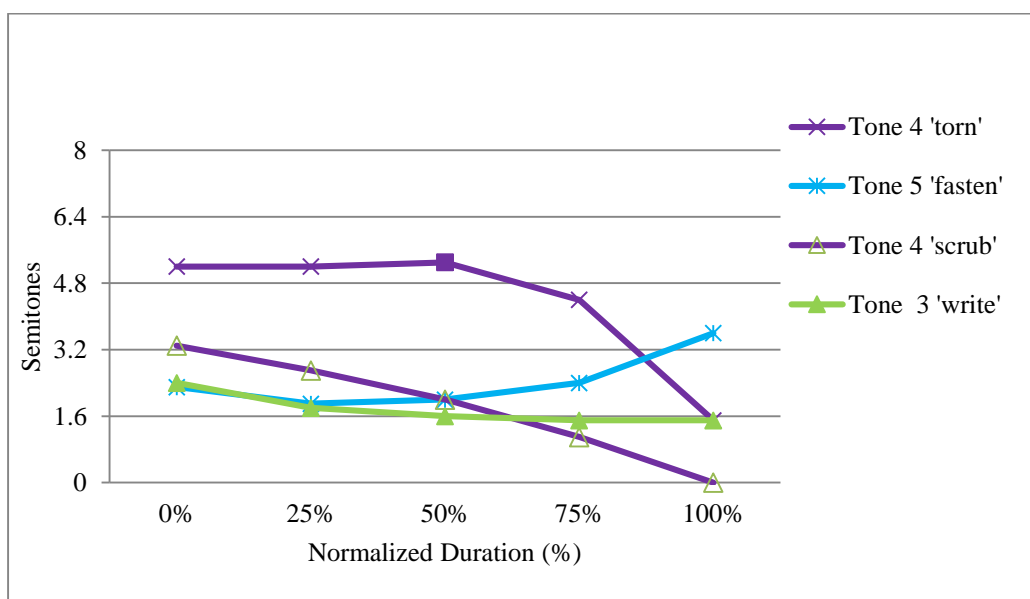
Figure 2: LK Five Tones on Live Syllables /k^haː/

Figure 3 presents two long dead syllables /k^haːt/ for Tones 4 and 5, and two short dead syllables /k^hat/ for Tones 4 and 3:

Figure 3: LK Three Tones on Dead Syllables /k^haːt/ for Tones 4 'torn' and 5 'fasten', and /k^hat/ for Tones 4 'scrub' and 3 'write'

In comparison with previous studies, described in Section 2.1, some, but not all, of LK tones of Ban Kut Chok resemble those of other LK varieties. For example, Tone 1 in LK of Ban Kut Chok resembles Tone 1 of LK at Song Phi Nong district, Suphan Buri, while Tone 2 in LK of Ban Kut Chok is close to that of LK in Nakhon Sawan, Nakhon Pathom, and one tonal variant in Kanchanaburi.²⁸ On the other hand, Tone 2 in LK looks different

²⁸ There were three tonal variants of Tone 2 in Sangkhla Buri district, Kanchanaburi. See Table 1 for details.

from that of Suphan Buri, and Loei. Such partial resemblance indicates that tones of LK in different regions have gradually deviated from each other.

4.2. Tones in Luang Phrabang Lao

LPL also has five tones in accordance with the type of syllable structure. Tone 1 is High Falling-to-Mid-Level /533/. Tone 2 is Low-Rising /12/. Tone 3 is Mid-Falling /32/. Tone 4 is High Level-Falling /552/. Finally, Tone 5 is Mid-Rising /34/. The tone of DL123 was treated as an allotone of Tone 4 because of its similar curve, despite the difference in height. The same factor also applies to the DL4 tone, which was considered an allotone of Tone 5 because of the similarity in tone shape with regard to its different height. A characteristic of the DS4 tone, despite its being level when given two tone letters, is that its curve slightly falls at the offset, as seen in Figure 5. The tonal assignment on different syllable structures and their pitch contours in semitones are shown Table 6, Figure 4, and Figure 5, respectively:

	A	B	C	DL	DS
1	Tone 1 High-Falling-to-Mid-Level /533/	Tone 3 Mid-Falling /32/	Tone 4 High Level-Falling /552/	Tone 4 Mid Level-Falling [332]	Tone 2 Low-Rising [12]
2	Tone 2 Low-Rising /12/		Tone 5 Mid-Rising /34/		
3					
4				Tone 5 Low-Rising [23]	Tone 3 Low Level [22]

Table 6: Five tones in LPL according to its split and merger pattern from my analysis

Figure 4 shows five LPL tones on the syllable structure /k^ha :/:

Figure 4: LPL Five Tones on Live Syllables /k^ha :/

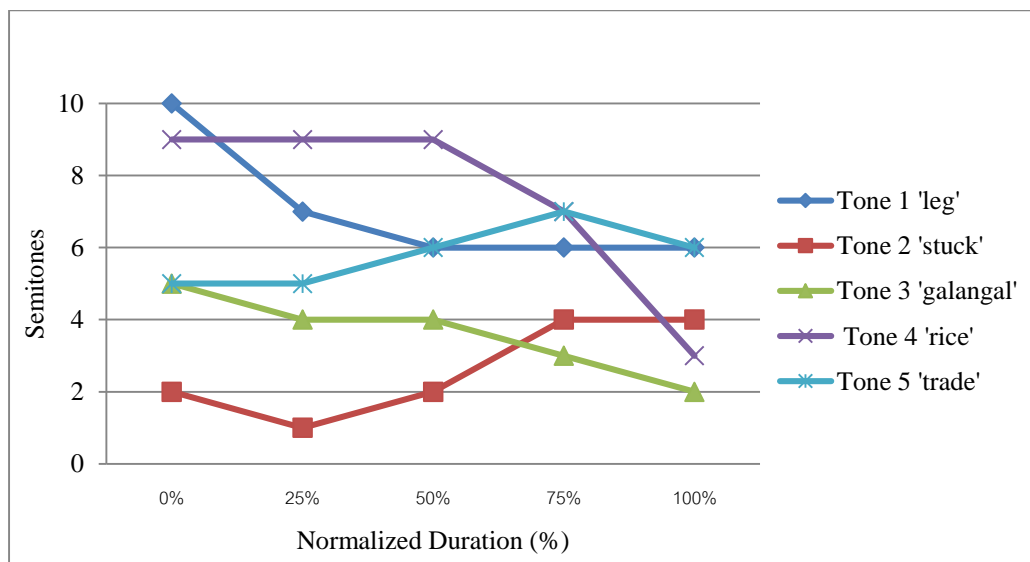
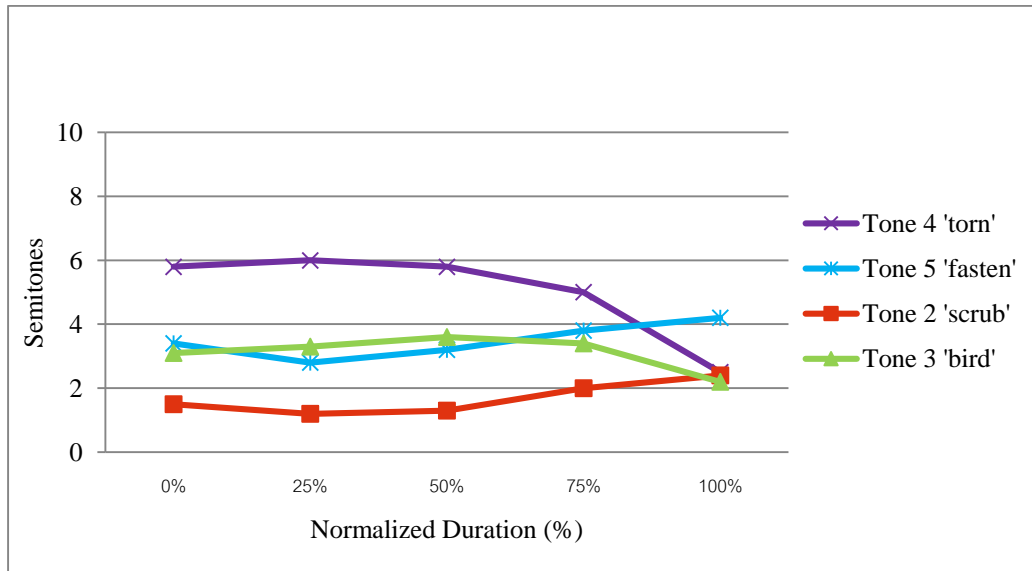


Figure 5 shows the tonal descriptions of the structure /k^ha:t/ for Tones 4 and 5, /k^hat/ for Tone 2, and /nok/ for Tone 3:

Figure 5: LPL Three Tones in dead syllables: /k^ha:t/ for Tones 4 'torn' and 5 'fasten', /k^hat/ for Tone 2 'scrub'. and /nok/ for Tone 3 'bird'

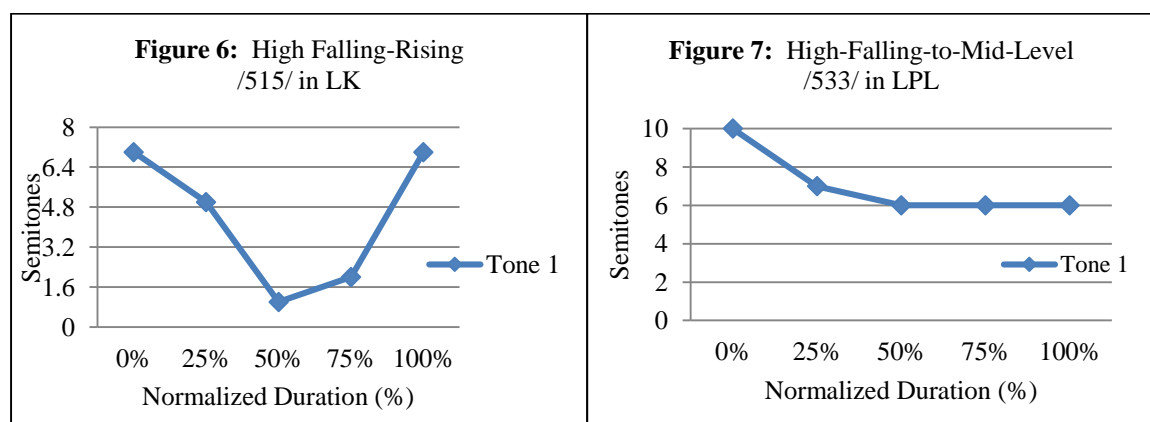


The tones in LPL from my data are similar to those described in Brown (1965), except for Tone 1, which is Mid-Falling-Rising in Brown's description, but High-Falling-to-Mid-Level from my data elicitation as shown above. There is no information about where Brown collected his tonal data, so it remains unclear how and why Tone 1 of these two studies is different.

4.3. Comparison between Lao Khrang and Luang Phrabang Lao

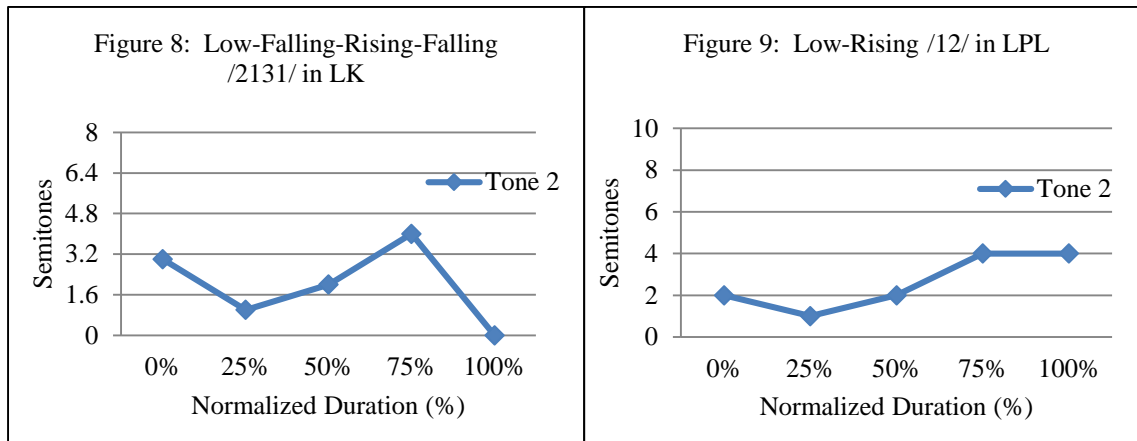
In this section, tones of both dialects were compared in semitones as follows:

4.3.1. Tone 1: Falling-Rising /515/ in LK and High-Falling-to-Mid-Level /533/ in LPL.



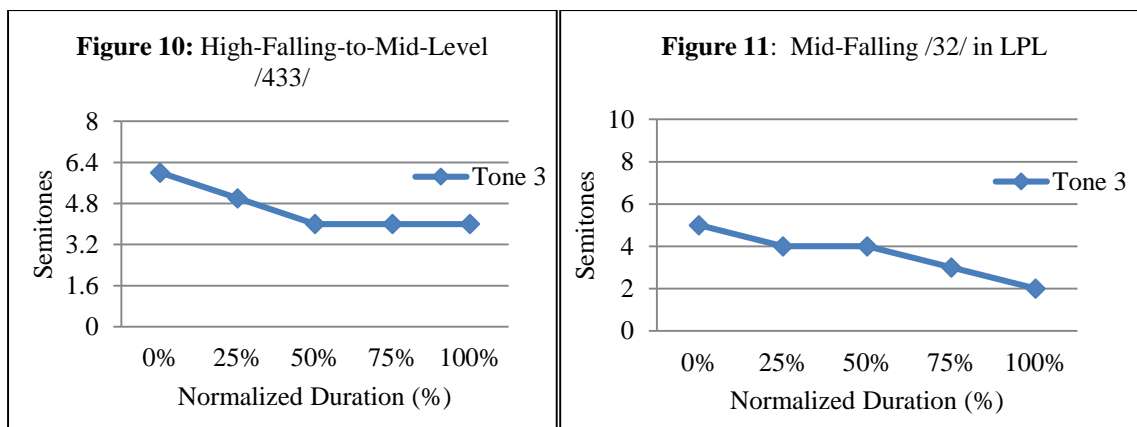
Both tones have high-falling shapes at the first half of the tones, but deviate in the pitch movement and in their pitch levels thereafter. Both tones occur in words of Box A1 such as /k^ha:1/ 'leg' and /hu:1/ 'ear.'

4.3.2. Tone 2: Low-Falling-Rising-Falling /2131/ in LK and Low-Rising /12/ in LPL



For Tone 2, the difference in the tonal movement can be seen at Point 75% where the tone starts to fall in LK, but remains level in LPL. Tone 2 in both dialects falls on words of Boxes A234, such as /dɛːŋ2/ ‘red’ and /k^hwaːj2/ ‘buffalo.’²⁹

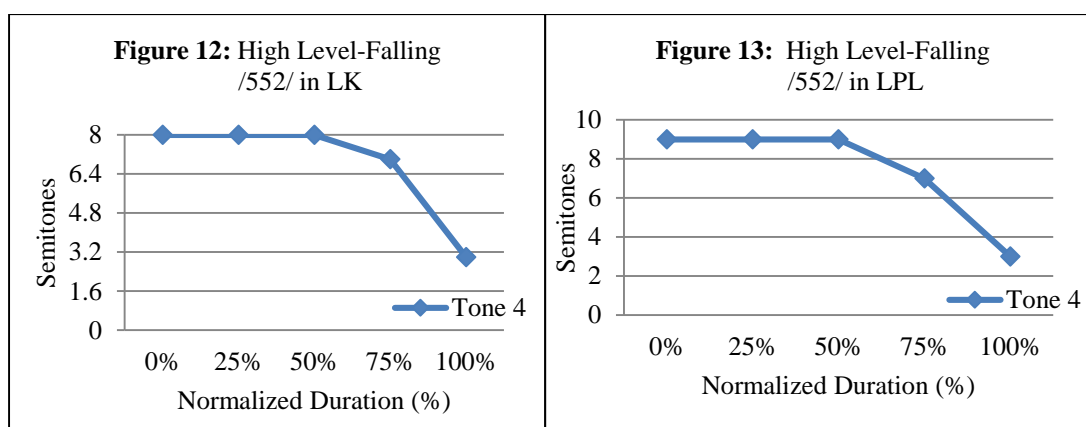
4.3.3. Tone 3: High-Falling-to-Mid-Level /433/ in LK and Mid-Falling /32/ LPL



Tone 3 in both dialects is falling, although it starts and ends at different levels. This tone is found in words of Boxes B1234, such as /siː4/ ‘four’ and /pian4/ ‘change.’

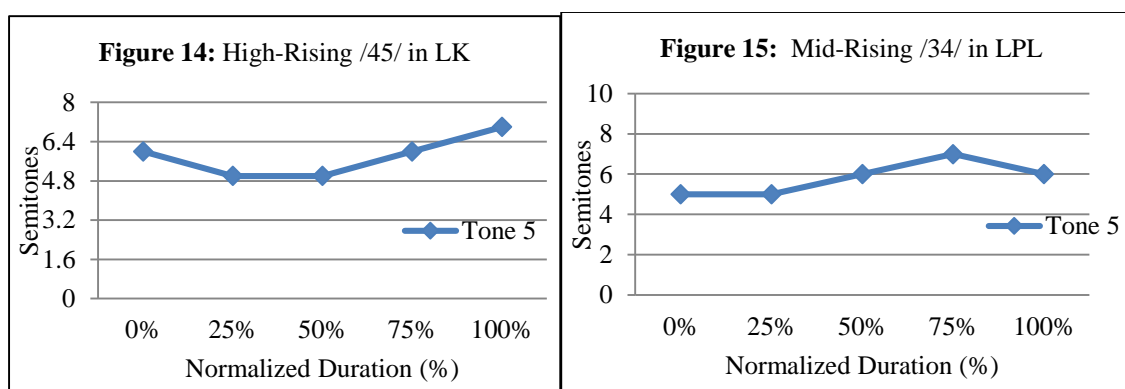
²⁹ Phonetically, this word is pronounced [k^huaɯj2] by many Lao speakers.

4.3.4. Tone 4: High Level-Falling /552/ in LK and LPL



Both dialects have this High Level-Falling tone in words of Box C1 as in /k^hɔj4/ ‘I,’ /san4/ ‘short,’ and DL123 as in /k^huat4/ ‘bottle,’ /bi : p4/ ‘squeeze.’

4.3.5. Tone 5: High-Rising /45/ in LK and Mid-Rising /34/ in LPL



Both dialects have a rising tone, although the tone moves downward at point 75% in LPL. Tone 5 can be found in words of Boxes C234, such as /kaw5/ ‘nine,’ /ma : 5/ ‘horse,’ and Box DL4 as in /mi : t5/ ‘knife,’ /se : p5/ ‘tasty.’

In summary, the results of the tonal analysis show that no tone of the two varieties is precisely the same in both height and shape. Tone 1 and Tone 2 have similar contour shape at the onset but they deviate from each other at Point 50% and Point 75%, respectively. Tone 3 and 4 are all falling tones. Tone 5 of the two varieties shows rising contour, but it deviates from the others at Point 75%. The deviation at the back points in Tone 1, Tone 2, and Tone 5 might therefore act as a phonetic cue for an LPL listener to be able to detect the non-native accent of an LK speaker, and vice versa. Further tonal differences could be observed in Boxes DS123 of both dialects; whereas the DS123 tone in LK was Low-Falling and thus classified as an allotone of Tone 4, the DS123 tone in LPL was Low-Rising, an allotone of Tone 2. Such differences may add up to a clearer deviation of tone between these two dialects. However, from my observation it seems that in connected speech the complex contour tones become simplified in both dialects. In connected speech, the

Falling-Rising (concave) shape of Tone 1 in LK becomes Falling, similar to Tone 1 in LPL. In the same fashion, the Falling-Rising-Falling (concave-convex) shape of Tone 2 in LK is reduced to a concave contour like Tone 2 in LPL. The phonetic Rising-Falling (convex) contour of Tone 5 in LPL becomes rising for some LPL speakers. Given the fact that the tones of both varieties become more similar to each other in connected speech, I assumed that there may not be many LPL speakers who would be able to distinguish the LK accent from their own.

5. The Results of Lao Khrang Accent Rated by Luang Phrabang Judges

As previously explained in Section 3, the judges were required to listen to forty sentence tokens. Three LK speakers uttered thirty sentences, with each one uttering five sentences. Each sentence was produced twice for this rating test (5 sentences x 3 LK speakers x 2 times = 30 sentence tokens). These thirty sentence tokens formed 75.0% of the tokens. The other ten sentences were controlled; eight were uttered by four LPL speakers. Each speaker uttered two sentences (4 LPL speakers x 2 times = 8 sentences). The other two sentences were uttered by one SLV speaker. These ten controlled sentences were sought to test whether the judges could detect their own LPL dialect and SLV as a non-LPL dialect.

I will first explain how I selected the judges for data analysis in 5.1. In this section, I will also show the results of the selected judges' ratings of the LPL and SLV accents, confirming their ability to detect the LPL accent of their own peers and the SLV accent as non-native to their ears. Section 5.2 shows and compares the results of all the judges' ratings of LK and LPL accents. Last, in Section 5.3, the results from LPL judges were divided into three age groups. The ratings of the LK accent, the LPL accent, and the SLV accent will be compared among these three groups.

5.1. Selection of the judges

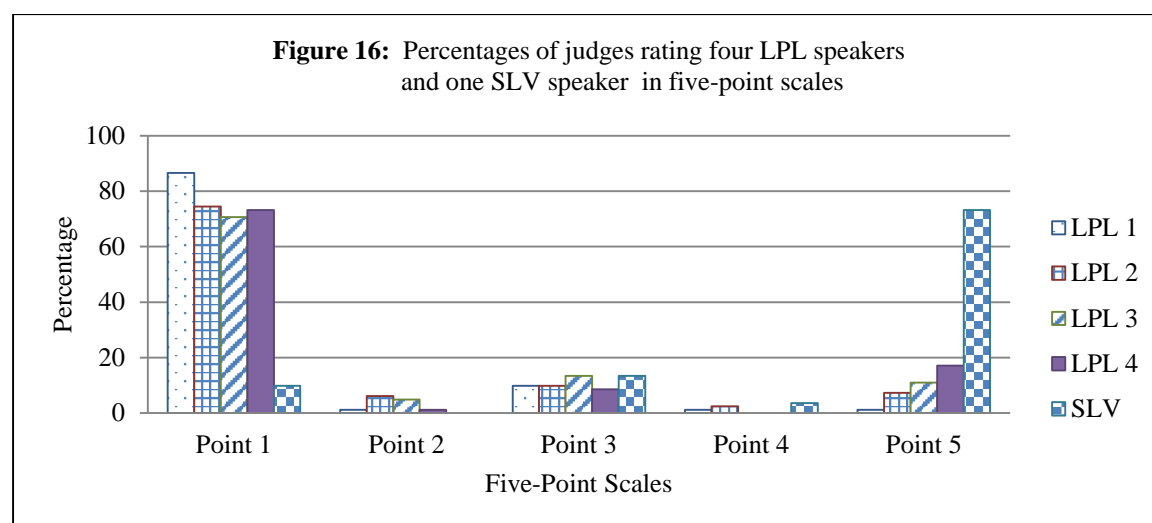
In addition to having no hearing impairment, a skillful judge should also have 'good ears,' by which I refer to the ability to detect the sentences uttered by LPL speakers as their own accent and the ones from the SLV dialect as foreign to their ears. In rating the LPL dialect, therefore, a skillful judge must tick either Point 1 or 2 (indicating 'definitely native accent' or 'probably native accent') as correct answers. On the other hand, she must choose either Point 4 or 5 (indicating 'probably non-native accent' or 'definitely non-native accent' respectively) when listening to sentences uttered by the SLV speaker. Skillful judges whose answers I used for the data analysis should have scores of five (or more) out of ten points in rating the LPL and SLV accents. That is, they should correctly detect the LPL accent as their own dialect (Point 1 or 2 on the Likert scales) and the SLV dialect as definitely a different dialect (Point 4 or 5 on the Likert scales) in at least half of all the controlled sentences.³⁰ Among the forty-two judges, all but one passed these criteria to qualify as a judge.³¹ Moreover, it can be seen from Appendix III that the youngest listener, (listener #1, age 15 in Appendix III) and the oldest one, (listener #42, age 80 in Appendix III) were qualified as judges for the rating test, despite the fact they were the youngest and oldest,

³⁰ In rating the LPL accent, Point 3 would be counted as an incorrect answer similar to Points 4 and 5, since it indicates that the judge could not identify her peer accent confidently. On the other hand, a judge who ticked Point 3 for the sentences uttered by one SLV speaker showed her ambivalence in rating. In this case, Point 3 would be grouped together with Points 1 and 2 as an incorrect answer, indicating the judge's inability to detect the foreignness of the SLV accent.

³¹ See Appendix III for the raw scores of all the judges.

because they received correct scores of 70% and 100%, respectively. The results of the rating test, therefore, are based on the scores from forty-one qualified judges.

The rating results of controlled sentences from the LPL and SLV accents by forty-one judges are shown below:



Note: Points 1–5 indicate the five-point Likert scales, ranging from ‘definitely native accent’ (Point 1) to ‘definitely non-native accent’ (Point 5). LPL1–4 refers to the four LPL speakers. SLV refers to one SLV speaker.

From Figure 16, it can be seen that more than 70.0% of all the judges gave the highest rating (Point 1) to all four LPL speakers. On the other hand, the lowest rate (Point 5) was given to the SLV speaker by 73.2% of all the judges. The results from Figure 16 indicate that these forty-one judges were able to distinguish the accent of their own peers from the foreign one.

The F-test or One-Way Anova in the following table shows that the judges’ rating scores given to four LPL speakers were not statistically significant, which means that LPL speakers were all perceived as correctly having the LPL accent by the judges.

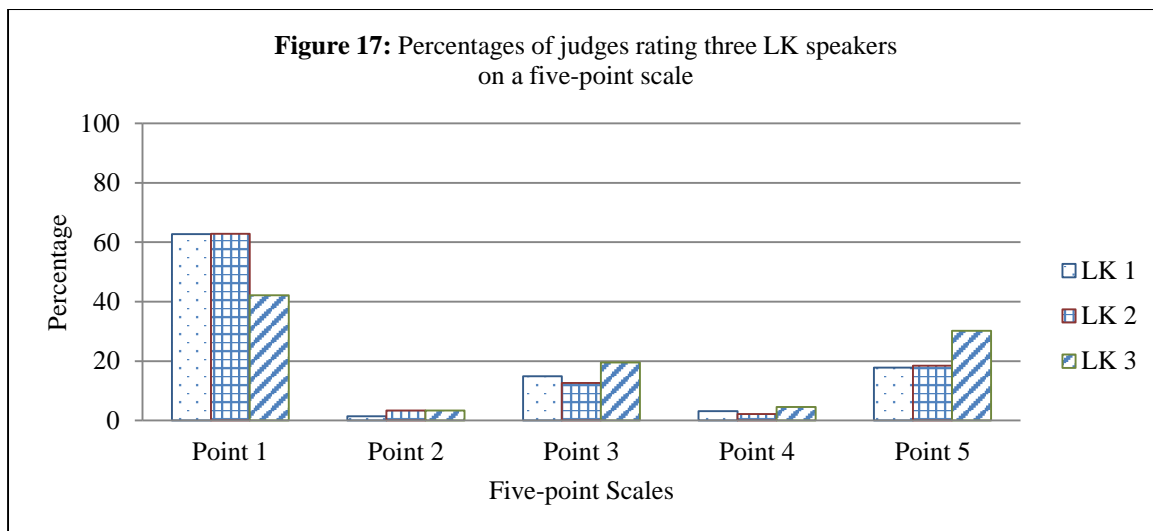
Table 7: F-test of average scores given to four LPL speakers

LPL speakers	N	\bar{X}	S.D.	F	Sig.
LPL 1	41	1.73	0.50	1.413	.241
LPL 2	41	1.61	0.59		
LPL 3	41	1.54	0.55		
LPL 4	41	1.49	0.64		
Total	164	1.59	0.57		

*Significant at level 0.05

5.2. Ratings of the LK accent

In Figure 17, the rating results of the LK accent from the sentence tokens uttered by three LK speakers, rated by forty-one LPL judges, are shown.



Note: LK1-3 refer to three LK speakers.

As shown in Figure 17, the ratings for LK 1 and LK 2 are proportional; 62.7% and 62.9% of all the judges assigned Point 1 to LK 1 and LK 2, respectively, while LK 3 was given Point 1 by less than half, or just 42.2%, of all the judges. The statistical results confirm that the ratings given to LK 3 were statistically different from those given to LK 1 and LK 2, as shown in Table 8:

Table 8: F-test of average scores given to three LK speakers

LK speakers	N	\bar{X}	S.D.	F	Sig.
LK 1	41	6.41	2.52	7.791	.001*
LK 2	41	6.59	2.40		
LK 3	41	4.56	2.79		
Total	123	5.85	2.72		

*Significant at level 0.05

In Table 8, the F-test or One-Way Anova indicates that the judges' rating scores given to all three LK speakers were statistically significant. Moreover, when the average scores given to each LK speaker were compared by using the Least Significant Difference (LSD) test, the scores given to LK 3 were found to be significantly different from those given to LK 1 and LK 2.

Table 9: Comparison of the rating scores given to three LK speakers

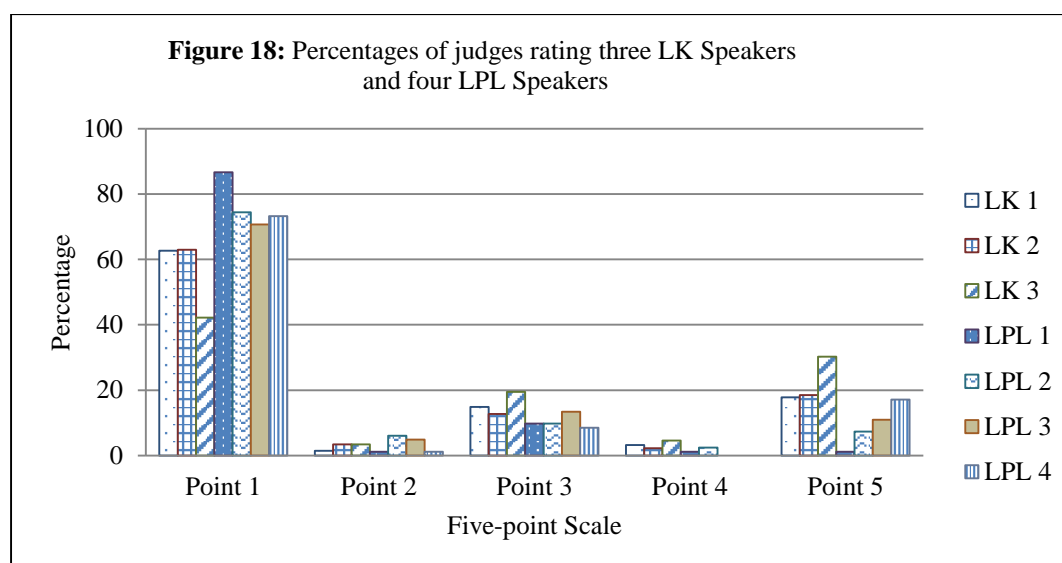
LK		LK1	LK2	LK3
	\bar{X}	6.41	6.59	4.56
LK1 (Sig.)	6.41	-	-0.18 (0.765)	1.85* (0.001)
LK2 (Sig.)	6.59	0.18 (0.765)	-	2.03* (0.001)
LK3 (Sig.)	4.56	-1.85* (0.001)	-2.03* (0.001)	-

*Significant at level 0.05

The statistical results from Tables 8 and 9 thus show that the perceptions of the LK accent vary across speakers, and that LK 3 was judged to have the heaviest foreign accent among three speakers. LK 3's speech will be discussed further in Section 6.

5.3. Ratings of the LK accent compared with the LPL accent

Figure 18 shows a comparison of the foreign-accent rating given to three LK speakers and four LPL speakers:



When the rating scores given to the LK accent were compared with those given to the LPL accents using the Paired Sample t-test, it was found that they were statistically significant, as shown in Table 10:

Table 10: Paired Sample t-test of difference in Ratings given to LPL and LK accents

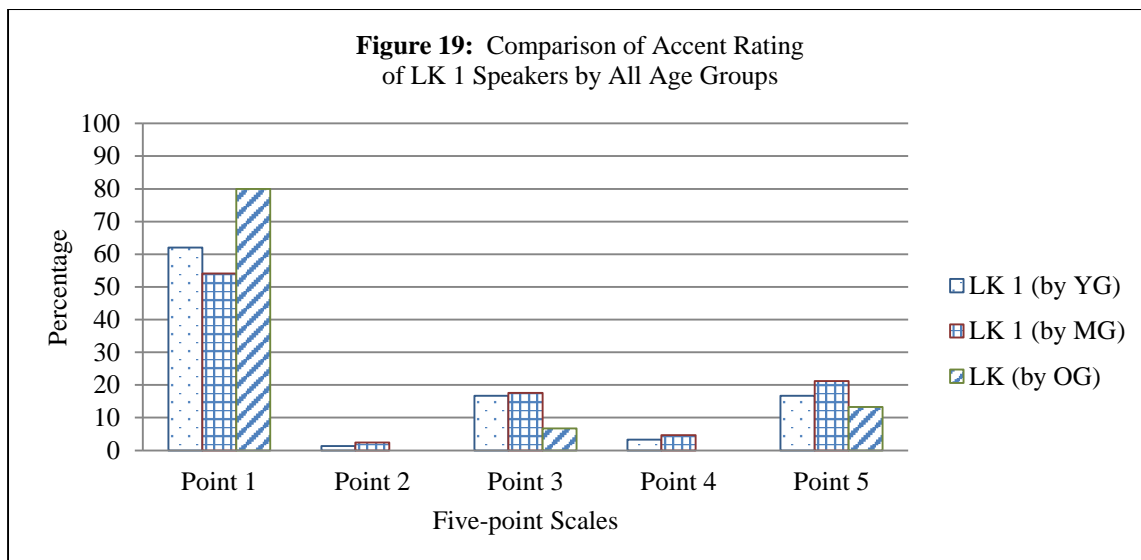
Total Scores: LK 1, LK 2, LK 3		Total scores: LPL 1, LPL 2, LPL 3, LPL 4		Total Scores: LK123 - Total scores: LPL 1234		T	Sig. (2-tailed)
Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
17.56	6.26	6.37	1.43	11.20	5.67	12.640	.000*

*Significant at level 0.05

Table 10 indicates that judges had no trouble identifying the LPL accent, but were uncertain when deciding the degree of native to non-native accent when listening to the LK accent.

5.4. Ratings of the LK accent by three different age groups

Because of the wide range of ages (from 15 to 80), the rating results were divided into three age groups; young generation (YG), between the ages of 15 and 24; middle generation (MG), between the ages of 25 and 44; and old generation (OG), between the ages of 45 and 80. Figures 19, 20, and 21 show the average scores (Points 1–5 on the Likert scales) given to the sentences uttered by LK 1, 2, and 3 speakers respectively. The statistical results will be shown and explained thereafter.



In Figure 19, sentences uttered by LK 1 were rated by judges of three different age groups. The percentages of the average number of judges selecting each point were remarkably different for different age groups, with the OG group rating Point 1 the highest. All in all, more than half of all the judges believed that the LK 1 speech was in the LPL accent.

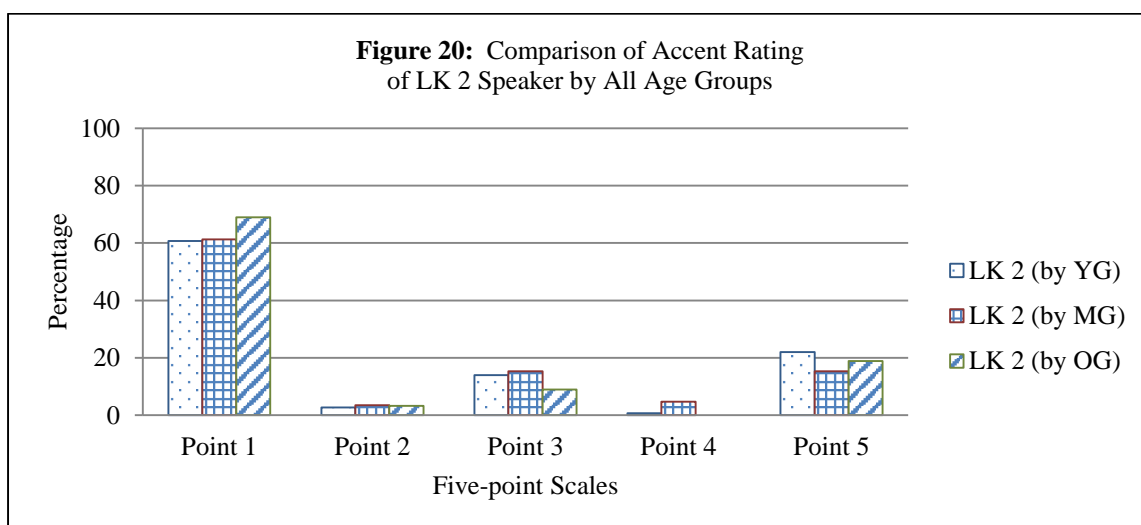


Figure 20 represents the average number of judges from the three different age groups who rated the speech of LK 2. More than half of all the judges gave Point 1 to sentences uttered by LK 2. As with the ratings of LK 1, the OG group also assigned Point 1 to LK 2's speech in a slightly higher number than the other two groups.

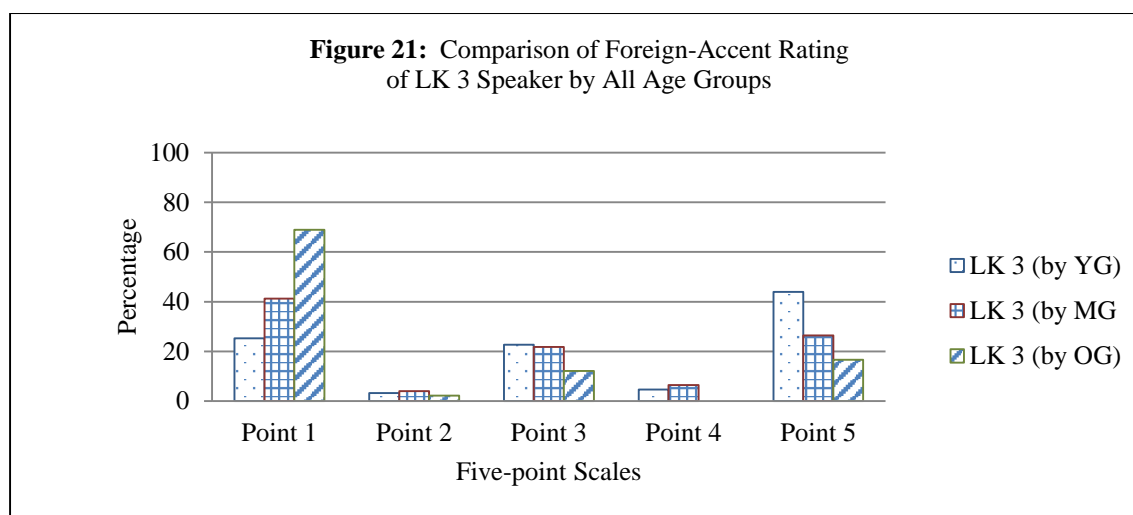


Figure 21 saw the most observable variation among the three groups of judges in assigning Point 1 to LK 3's speech. Only 25.3% of the YG group felt that LK 3's speech was that of an LPL speaker. On the contrary, as many as 68.9% of the OG were more tolerant in accepting that LK 3's speech evidenced an LPL accent.

Given the fact that there were variations across the ratings of each speaker as well as each age group, statistical tests were conducted to determine if there was any significance between the ratings of different groups. Using the F-test, Table 11 shows the rating results of the LK accent divided by the three age groups below:

Table 11: F-test of average scores given to LK speakers

Age of judges	N	\bar{X}	S.D.	F	Sig.
15-24 years old (16 judges)	15	15.53	3.40	4.698	.015*
25-44 years old (17 judges)	17	16.65	6.04		
45-80 years old (9 judges)	9	22.67	7.98		
Total	41	17.56	6.26		

*Significant at level 0.05

The results shown in Table 11 were statistically significant when the F-test or One-Way Anova was used to test for the statistical significance among different age groups. In other words, age was indeed a factor that affected the ratings of the LK accent. Table 12 contains the statistical results using the L.S.D. test to compare the ratings among each age group.

Table 12: Comparison of the rating scores of the LK accents by three groups

Age		15-24 years old	25-44 years old	45-80 years old
	\bar{X}	15.53	16.65	22.67
15-24 years old (Sig.)	15.53	-	-1.12 (0.588)	-7.14* (0.006)
25-44 years old (Sig.)	16.65	1.12 (0.588)	-	-6.02* (0.015)
45-80 years old (Sig.)	22.67	7.14* (0.006)	6.02* (0.015)	-

*Significant at level 0.05

As Table 12 shows, the ratings of the OG group were found to be significantly different from the other two age groups, indicating that the OG group accepted the LK accent as being LPL more than the other two groups.

5.4. Ratings of the controlled sentences of LPL and SLV by three different age groups

Further statistical analyses were conducted to find out whether there was any significance in rating the LPL accent and the SLV accent among judges of different age groups. We have already seen from Figure 16 that as many as 70.0% of all the judges could identify the speech from all four LPL speakers as their own accent. The following table, Table 13, presents statistical results as follows:

Table 13: F-test of average scores given to LPL speakers

Age	N	\bar{X}	S.D.	F	Sig.
15-24 years old	15	6.27	1.28	.111	.895
25-44 years old	17	6.35	1.50		
45-80 years old	9	6.56	1.67		
Total	41	6.37	1.43		

*Significant at level 0.05

Using the F-test or One-Way Anova revealed that the rating scores given to the LPL accent by the three groups of judges were not statistically significant, which means that the judges of all ages could clearly identify all of the LPL accents.

Figure 16 also reveals that 73.2% of all the judges rated the SLV accent as a foreign accent. The F-test results as shown in Table 14 shows the insignificant difference in the SLV ratings among the three age groups:

Table 14: F-test of average scores given to SLV speakers

Age	N	\bar{X}	S.D.	F	Sig.
15-24 years old	15	0.13	0.35	.720	.493
25-44 years old	17	0.18	0.39		
45-80 years old	9	0.33	0.50		
Total	41	0.20	0.40		

*Significant at level 0.05

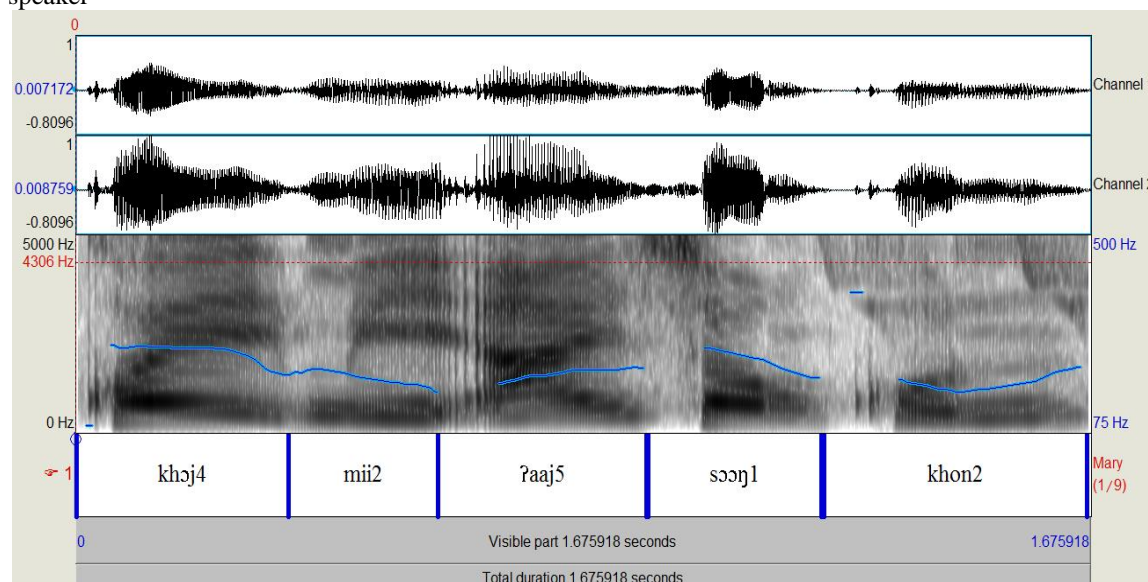
In sum, approximately 70.0%-80.0% of all the qualified judges could identify all four LPL speakers as speaking their own dialect, with no statistical significance among the three different age groups. Of the judges, 73.2% noticed that the SLV accent was a different dialect, again, with no statistical significance between the three age groups. On the other hand, the ratings of the LK accent yielded statistical significance between both the LK speakers and the different age groups. The scores given to the third LK speaker were significantly different from those given to the other two LK speakers. Moreover, the ratings given by the different age groups were found to be statistically different. The following section will discuss the possible reasons for these differences.

Discussion

Section 5 revealed that the three age groups gave ratings of the LK 3 speaker that were significantly different from each other. While LK 1 and LK 2 were given Point 1 scores (i.e., that their accents were LPL) at 62.7% and 62.9% by all the judges, the LK 3 speaker did not ‘pass’ this native-like ratings test, although the oldest group of judges seemed to be more accepting, compared to the other two groups, as they most frequently gave Point 1 to her accent. The LK 3 speaker received Point 1 scores from only 42.2% of all the judges, which means that less than half of them believed that her accent was definitely that of LPL.

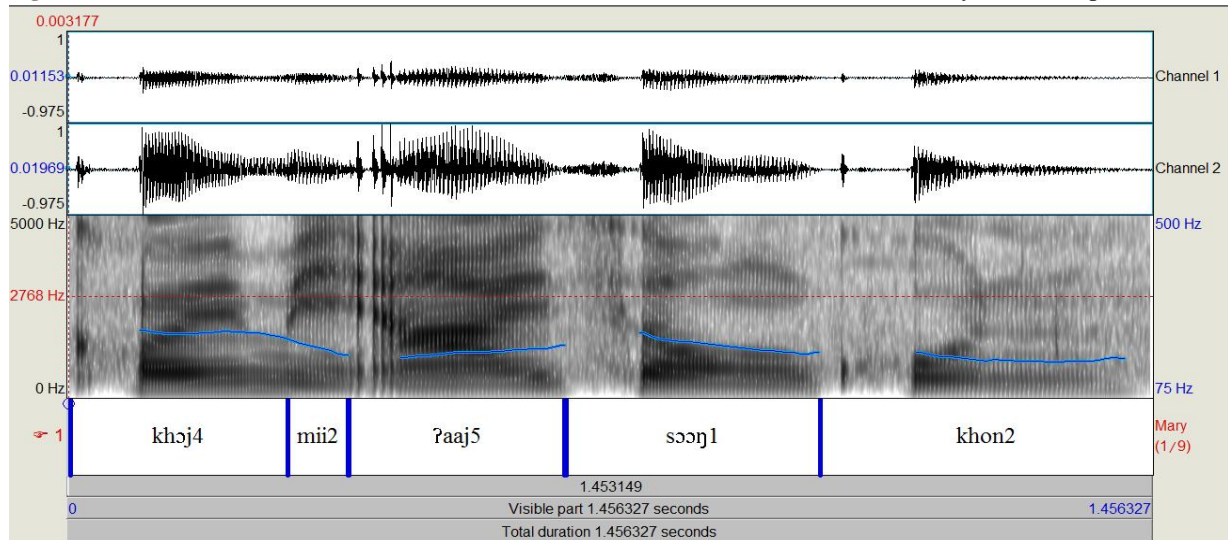
Before looking at what makes her speech sound less LPL native-like compared to the other two, we need to refer back to the results of the comparison between the tonal systems of LK and LPL. In Section 4, I mentioned that Tone 1, Tone 2, and Tone 5 in both dialects all become less complex in shape when they are a part of connected speech, making their tonal contours more similar to each other. Next, we compare the waveform of the same sentence uttered by the LPL 2 and LK 1 speakers.³²

Figure 22: Waveform of the sentence /k^hɔj4 mi:2 ʔa:j5 sɔ:ɲ1 k^hon2/ uttered by the LPL 2 speaker

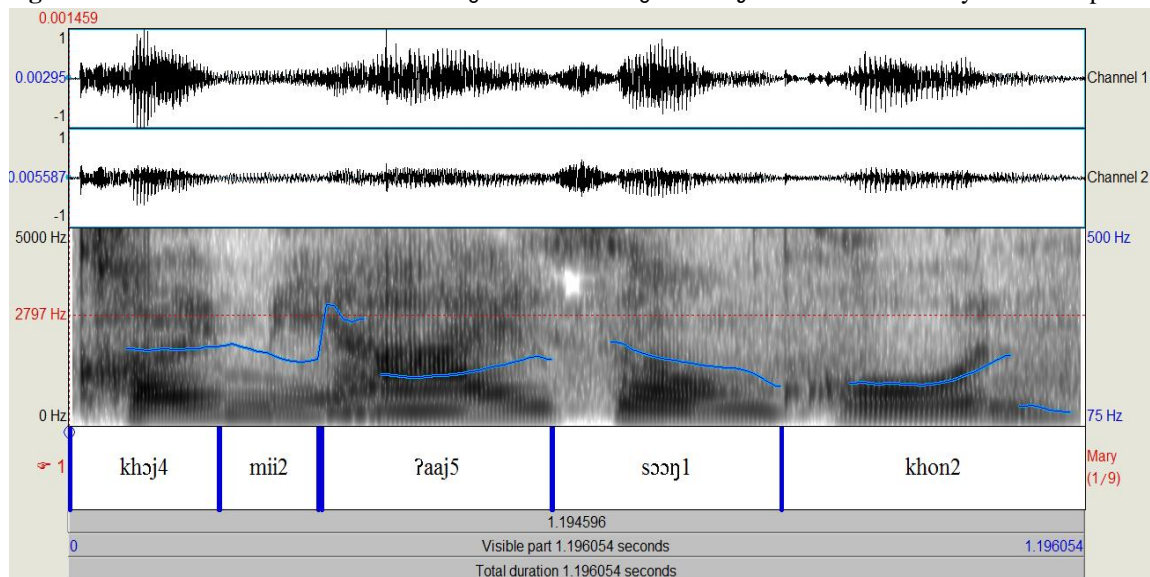


This sentence consists of all the four tones in question: Tone 1, Tone 2, Tone 4, and Tone 5. The waveform shows that Tone 4 High Level-Falling /552/ in the first syllable /k^hɔj4/ becomes level, slightly falling towards the following syllable. Tone 2 Low-Rising /12/ in /mi:2/ becomes falling. Tone 5 Mid-Rising /34/ in /ʔa:j5/ remains its rising contour. Tone 1 High-Falling-to-Mid Level /533/ in /sɔ:ɲ1/ was reduced to falling. Tone 2 in the last syllable /k^hon2/, unlike the second syllable, maintains its rising contour.

³² Due to some technical problems, the IPA transcriptions described in Figures 22, 23, and 24 show double vowels, for example, /aa/ instead of /a:/, and /h/ for the superscript /-^h/, as in /kh/ instead of /k^h/.

Figure 23: Waveform of the sentence /k^hɔj4 mi:2 ʔa:j5 sɔ:ɲ1 k^hon2/ uttered by the LK 1 speaker

In this sentence uttered by LK 1, it can be seen that Tone 1, Tone 2, and Tone 4 become less complex in shape just like the sentence uttered by the LPL 2. Tone 4 High Level-Falling /552/ (/k^hɔj4/) becomes level, Tone 2 Low Falling-Rising-Falling /2131/ (/mi:2/) only falls, Tone 5 High-Rising /45/ maintains its rising contour, Tone 1 High-Falling-Rising /515/ (/sɔ:ɲ1/) was reduced to falling. The last syllable, which bears Tone 2, simply becomes level.³³ By comparing the tonal patterns of these two utterances, it is not so surprising that as many as 62.7% of all the judges believed that LK 1 had an LPL accent, even if her tonal assignment of the last syllable was not what should have been expected. Now, let us take a look at the tonal pattern shown in the utterance of LK 3, below:

Figure 24: Waveform of the sentence /k^hɔj4 mi:2 ʔa:j5 sɔ:ɲ1 k^hon2/ uttered by the LK 3 speaker

³³ The word /k^hon2/ in standard Thai bears a Mid-Level tone. This word was uttered in mid-level according to the waveform in Figure 23, as well as from what I heard. Obviously, the speaker accidentally switched to the Thai tone. This tone-switching is not surprising because all of the speakers could speak Standard Thai.

From Figure 24, Tone 4 High Level-Falling /552/ of the first syllable /k^hɔj4/ becomes level, Tone 2 Low-Falling-Rising-Falling /2131/ (/mi:2/) was shortened to slightly falling,³⁴ Tone 5 High-Rising /45/ maintains its rising contour, Tone 1 High-Falling-Rising /515/ (/sɔ:ŋ1/) becomes falling. Tone 2 of the last syllable /k^hon2/ becomes rising. By comparing LK 3's tonal patterns with those of LPL 2 and LK 1 above, LK 3's tonal production was not so different from the other two. In particular, LK 3 could utter the word /k^hon2/ in its correct tonal variant: rising. In this regard, her overall tonal pattern was even closer to that of LPL 2 as shown above. And yet she was rated the lowest. It is clear from this account that the tonal pattern was not the main factor that caused the lowest ratings of her utterances by all the judges. Certainly, there must have been some other phonetic cues that might have affected the perception of speech sound. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to investigate phonetic cues other than tones. I speculate that the lowest ratings she received from judges were due to the harshness of her voice quality, as can be seen from the fuzziness in her waveform. Other phonetic cues such as the quality of consonants, vowel length, and rhythm, should be further investigated.

In Section 5, we saw that three generational groups gave significantly different ratings to the LK accents, with the OG group being the most generous judges. This is perhaps because the YG were exposed to a wider variety of accents than the OG, who spend most of the time at home without much contact with outsiders, and so were more tolerant in rating different accents.

To recapitulate, despite some utterances produced by the third LK speaker which could be easily recognized as non-native by a large number of LPL judges, it could be concluded that two of three LK speakers' accents are close to LPL's, due to the fact that more than half of the judges could not differentiate them from their own accent. As mentioned in the first section, LK are descendants of the people who lived in the area of what is now Luang Phrabang over two-hundred years ago. The results from tonal production and perception indicate that the tonal systems of both dialects remain close to each other, and that more than half of the LPL judges could not detect the non-native accents of two of the three LK speakers. We learn from these results that the age of the judges as well as the speaker's idiosyncratic quality of voice play crucial roles in rating one's accent. We should also keep in mind that the results from this research were from female judges. It would be interesting to find out how male judges would rate the LK accents when compared with the results from females.

6. Conclusions

The LK people of Ban Kut Chok village, Nong Mamong district, Chai Nat Province are descended from LPL migrants. The exact date of migration is hitherto unknown, although they must have arrived in Thailand about two hundred years ago as prisoners of war from several battles between Siam and Laos from the reign of King Taksin to the reign of King Rama III. Today, the younger generations of LK at Ban Kut Chok village cannot speak LK, although some might still be able to comprehend it. The comparison between the tonal systems of LK and LPL reveals that there are similarities between most tones and their tonal variants, which leads to a prediction that LPL native speakers might mistake LK

³⁴ An abrupt rising curve could be observed at the end of this word /mi:2/, which preceded the initial glottal stop /ʔ/ of the next word /ʔa:j5/. This glottal stop apparently inhibits turbulence probably due to its creaky voice quality. I thus speculate that the sharp rising curve mentioned above was affected by the creaky voice quality of the following /ʔ/, if not by other unknown acoustic factors.

as their own accent. This is indeed the case at least for two of the three LK speakers; more than half of the LPL judges rated utterances from two LK speakers as their native accent (62.7% for LK 1 and 62.9% for LK 2), while 42.2% of them rated utterances as native-like for the third speaker. Although the LK dialect has been dominated by Standard Thai since the day their descendants moved to settle in the land of Siam two hundred years ago, the results from both tonal production and perception analyses indicated that there are still linguistic ties between both dialects even if there has been no language contact between these two communities. Further research should be carried out to include male judges in the ratings. Moreover, it would be interesting to assess the ratings of the LPL accents by LK speakers. In this way, a more complete picture of the tonal perceptions of these two dialects could emerge.

7. Acknowledgements

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Appendix I: Sixty Word lists for data elicitation, arranged in Gedney's tone box.

(Adapted from Phinnarat 2546)

	A	B	C	DL	DS
1	1. /hu :/ 'ear' 2. /k ^h a :/ 'leg' 3. /so :ŋ/ 'two'	13. /p ^h aj/ 'bamboo' 14. /k ^h a :/ 'galangal' 15. /t ^h ua/ 'bean'	25. /ha :/ 'five' 26. /sua/ 'shirt' 27. /mo :/ 'pot'	37. /k ^h uat/ 'bottle' 38. /muak/ 'cap' 39. /so :k/ 'elbow'	49. /p ^h ak/ 'vegetable' 50. /hok/ 'six' 51. /sip/ 'ten'
2	4. /pu :/ 'crab' 5. /ta :/ 'eye' 6. /kin/ 'eat'	16. /kaj/ 'chicken' 17. /taw/ 'tortoise' 18. /pa :/ 'woods'	28. /kaw/ 'nine' 29. /pa :/ 'aunt' 30. /tu :/ 'closet'	40. /pi :k/ 'wing' 41. /ko :t/ 'hug' 42. /pa :k/ 'mouth'	52. /kop/ 'frog' 53. /cet/ 'seven' 54. /te?/ 'kick'
3	7. /dɛ :ŋ/ 'red' 8. /da :w/ 'star' 9. /baj/ 'leaf'	19. /ba :/ 'shoulders' 20. /ʔim/ 'full' 21. /da :/ 'scold'	31. /da :j/ 'thread' 32. /ʔo :j/ 'sugar cane' 33. /ʔa :j/ 'elder brother'	43. /bi :p/ 'squeeze' 44. /bo :t/ 'blind' 45. /du :t/ 'suck'	55. /bet/ 'fishhook' 56. /dip/ 'raw' 57. /ʔok/ 'chest'
4	10. /mɯ :/ 'hand' 11. /k ^h wa :j/ 'buffalo' 12. /ŋu :/ 'snake'	22. /p ^h o :/ 'dad' 23. /ɭaj/ 'saw' 24. /mɛ :/ 'mom'	34. /k ^h iw/ 'eyebrow' 35. /nam/ 'water' 36. /lin/ 'tongue'	46. /mi :t/ 'knife' 47. /sɛ :p/ 'tastety' 48. /swak/ 'rope'	58. /nok/ 'bird' 59. /mot/ 'ant' 60. /lep/ 'nail'

Note: There are three types of lines. Each type represents the following:

1. Thin lines are the box frame.
2. Thick lines show patterns of the tonal split. For example, the horizontal thick line between A1 and A2 indicates that A1 splits from A2-3-4.
3. Dot lines show patterns of tonal merger. For example, all the horizontal dot lines in Column B indicate that B1-2-3 and 4 merge into one single toneme.
4. The word /baj/ 'leaf' has a diphthong /aj/ in LK but /aɯj/ in LPL.

APPENDIX II: Rating Sheet for Luang Phrabang Judges (originally written in Lao with no English translation)

ຊື່..... ອາຍຸ..... ຊາຍ.. ☐ ຍິງ ☐
 Name Age Male Female

ບ້ານ..... ຮຽນຊັ້ນໃດ..... ອາຊີບ.....
 Village Name Highest Degree Occupation

ກະລຸນາຟັງປະໂຫຍກຕໍ່ໄປນີ້ ແລ້ວຕັດສິນກ່ຽວກັບສໍານຽງປາກເວົ້າຕາມຄວາມເຫັນຂອງທ່ານ
 ໂດຍຂຽນເຄື່ອງໝາຍ ✓ ລົງໃນຊ່ອງວ່າງທີ່ເໝາະສົມ

Please listen to the following sentences and decide the degree of nativeness according to your view by ticking the most appropriate box:

- 1 ແມ່ນໝາຍເຖິງ ສຽງນີ້ ແມ່ນຄົນຫຼວງພະບາງຢ່າງແນ່ນອນ.
 Box 1: This is definitely a speech sample of a LPL person.
- 2 ແມ່ນໝາຍເຖິງ ສຽງນີ້ ຄືຊື່ແມ່ນຄົນຫຼວງພະບາງ.
 Box 2: This is probably a speech sample of a LPL person.
- 3 ແມ່ນໝາຍເຖິງ ບໍ່ສູ້ແນ່ໃຈປານໃດ.
 Box 3: I'm not sure where the speaker comes from.
- 4 ແມ່ນໝາຍເຖິງ ສຽງນີ້ ຄືຊື່ບໍ່ແມ່ນຄົນຫຼວງພະບາງ.
 Box 4: This is probably not a speech sample of a LPL person.
- 5 ແມ່ນໝາຍເຖິງ ສຽງນີ້ ບໍ່ແມ່ນຄົນຫຼວງພະບາງຢ່າງແນ່ນອນ.
 Box 5: This is definitely not a speech sample of a LPL person.

ປະໂຫຍກທັງໝົດມີ 40 ປະໂຫຍກ There are 40 sentences in total.	1 ແມ່ນແທ້ Definitely	2 ຄືຊື່ແມ່ນ Probably	3 ບໍ່ແນ່ໃຈ Not sure	4 ຄືຊື່ບໍ່ແມ່ນ Probably not	5 ບໍ່ແມ່ນແທ້ Definitely not
1. ຂ້ອຍມີອ້າຍສອງຄົນ. /k ^h ɔj4 mi:2 ʔa:j5 sɔ:ŋ1 k ^h on2/					
2. ຂ້ອຍເຈັບມືຫຼາຍ. /k ^h ɔj4 cɛp3 mu:2 la:j1/					
3. ຂ້ອຍມີອ້າຍສອງຄົນ. /k ^h ɔj4 mi:2 ʔa:j5 sɔ:ŋ1 k ^h on2/					
4. ຂ້ອຍມີຄວາຍສອງໂຕ. /k ^h ɔj4 mi:2 k ^h wa:j2 sɔ:ŋ1 to:2/					

5. ນ້ຳເຫັນຄວາຍຫ້າໂຕ. /na:5 hen2 k ^h wa:j2 ha:4 to:2/					
6. ຂ້ອຍມີຄວາຍສອງໂຕ. /k ^h ɔj4 mi:2 k ^h wa:j2 sɔ:ŋ1 to:2/					
7. ນ້ຳເຫັນຄວາຍຫ້າໂຕ. /na:5 hen2 k ^h wa:j2 ha:4 to:2/					
8. ນ້ຳເຫັນຄວາຍຫ້າໂຕ. /na:5 hen2 k ^h wa:j2 ha:4 to:2/					
9. ຂ້ອຍມີອ້າຍສອງຄົນ. /k ^h ɔj4 mi:2 ʔa:j5 sɔ:ŋ1 k ^h on2/					
10. ນ້ຳເຫັນຄວາຍຫ້າໂຕ. /na:5 hen2 k ^h wa:j2 ha:4 to:2/					
11. ຂ້ອຍມີອ້າຍສອງຄົນ. /k ^h ɔj4 mi:2 ʔa:j5 sɔ:ŋ1 k ^h on2/					
12. ນ້ຳເຫັນຄວາຍຫ້າໂຕ. /na:5 hen2 k ^h wa:j2 ha:4 to:2/					
13. ຂ້ອຍມີອ້າຍສອງຄົນ. /k ^h ɔj4 mi:2 ʔa:j5 sɔ:ŋ1 k ^h on2/					
14. ຂ້ອຍເຈັບມືຫຼາຍ. /k ^h ɔj4 cep3 mu:2 la:j1/					
15. ມີອ້າຍຫ້າຄົນ. /mi:2 ʔa:j5 ha:4 k ^h on2/					
16. ນ້ຳເຫັນຄວາຍຫ້າໂຕ. /na:5 hen2 k ^h wa:j2 ha:4 to:2/					
17. ຂ້ອຍເຈັບມືຫຼາຍ. /k ^h ɔj4 cep3 mu:2 la:j1/					
18. ຂ້ອຍມີຄວາຍສອງໂຕ. /k ^h ɔj4 mi:2 k ^h wa:j2 sɔ:ŋ1 to:2/					
19. ຂ້ອຍເຈັບມືຫຼາຍ. /k ^h ɔj4 cep3 mu:2 la:j1/					
20. ຂ້ອຍມີຄວາຍສອງໂຕ. /k ^h ɔj4 mi:2 k ^h wa:j2 sɔ:ŋ1 to:2/					
21. ນ້ຳເຫັນຄວາຍຫ້າໂຕ. /na:5 hen2 k ^h wa:j2 ha:4 to:2/					
22. ມີອ້າຍຫ້າຄົນ. /mi:2 ʔa:j5 ha:4 k ^h on2/					
23. ຂ້ອຍມີອ້າຍສອງຄົນ. /k ^h ɔj4 mi:2 ʔa:j5 sɔ:ŋ1 k ^h on2/					

24. ມີອ້າຍທ້າຄົນ. /mi:2 ?a:j5 ha:4 k ^h on2/					
25. ນ້າເຫັນຄວາຍທ້າໂຕ. /na:5 hen2 k ^h wa:j2 ha:4 to:2/					
26. ຂ້ອຍມີອ້າຍສອງຄົນ. /k ^h uj4 mi:2 ?a:j5 sɔ:ŋ1 k ^h on2/					
27. ຂ້ອຍມີອ້າຍສອງຄົນ. /k ^h uj4 mi:2 ?a:j5 sɔ:ŋ1 k ^h on2/					
28. ນ້າເຫັນຄວາຍທ້າໂຕ. /na:5 hen2 k ^h wa:j2 ha:4 to:2/					
29. ຂ້ອຍມີອ້າຍສອງຄົນ. /k ^h uj4 mi:2 ?a:j5 sɔ:ŋ1 k ^h on2/					
30. ຂ້ອຍເຈັບມືຫຼາຍ. /k ^h uj4 cep3 mur:2 la:j1/					
31. ຂ້ອຍມີອ້າຍສອງຄົນ. /k ^h uj4 mi:2 ?a:j5 sɔ:ŋ1 k ^h on2/					
32. ຂ້ອຍມີຄວາຍສອງໂຕ. /k ^h uj4 mi:2 k ^h wa:j2 sɔ:ŋ1 to:2/					
33. ມີອ້າຍທ້າຄົນ. /mi:2 ?a:j5 ha:4 k ^h on2/					
34. ຂ້ອຍເຈັບມືຫຼາຍ. /k ^h uj4 cep3 mur:2 la:j1/					
35. ມີອ້າຍທ້າຄົນ. /mi:2 ?a:j5 ha:4 k ^h on2/					
36. ນ້າເຫັນຄວາຍທ້າໂຕ. /na:5 hen2 k ^h wa:j2 ha:4 to:2/					
37. ມີອ້າຍທ້າຄົນ. /mi:2 ?a:j5 ha:4 k ^h on2/					
38. ນ້າເຫັນຄວາຍທ້າໂຕ. /na:5 hen2 k ^h wa:j2 ha:4 to:2/					
39. ຂ້ອຍມີຄວາຍສອງໂຕ. /k ^h uj4 mi:2 k ^h wa:j2 sɔ:ŋ1 to:2/					
40. ຂ້ອຍມີອ້າຍສອງຄົນ. /k ^h uj4 mi:2 ?a:j5 sɔ:ŋ1 k ^h on2/					

Appendix III: Information of Judges and Their Performance in Correctly Identifying the LPL and SLV Accents

Notes:

- Judges #1-#16 belong to the Young Generation (YG) group (16 judges)
Judges #17-#33 belong to the Middle Generation (MG) group (17 judges)
Judges #34-#42 belong to the Old Generation (OG) group (9 judges)
- Judge #2 was not selected for data analysis because her rating performance was less than 50% in correctly detecting the LPL and non-LPL (SLV) accents.

Table 15: Information of Judges Divided by Three Age Groups

Names	Ages	Academic level	Profession	Correctness of rating SLV	Correctness of rating LPL	Total scores of rating SLV and LPL in Percentage
Young Generation Group (YG)						
1. Ms. Chantaphon	15	M.5	Student	2/2	5/8	70
2. Ms. Nuk	17	M.7	student	1/2	2/8	30
3. Ms. Not	17	Primary	Rice farmer	2/2	5/8	70
4. Ms. Nanoi	20	P.5	Gardener	2/2	7/8	90
5. Ms. Khamphio	20	P.5	Rice farmer	1/2	8/8	90
6. Ms. Lunni	20	M.3	Rice farmer	2/2	4/8	60
7. Ms. La	20	M.7	Gardener	1/2	8/8	90
8. Ms. Saeng-alun	21	Teaching	student	1/2	8/8	90
9. Ms. Ueang	22	P.5	Gardener	2/2	8/8	100
10. Ms. Pha	22	P.5	Rice farmer	2/2	4/8	60
11. Ms. Noi	22	P.5	Gardener	1/2	7/8	80
12. Ms. Mon	22	P.4	Gardener	2/2	5/8	70
13. Ms. Nayai	23	P.5	Gardener	2/2	8/8	100
14. Ms. Suksamai	23	Vocation	Student	2/2	7/8	90
15. Ms. Wongduean	24	P.5	Gardener	0/2	8/8	80
16. Ms. Tip	24	M.6	Seller	2/2	8/8	100
Middle Generation (MG)						
17. Ms. Buawon	26	P.5	Seller	2/2	7/8	90
18. Ms. Chanthon	27	M.6	Do nothing	1/2	4/8	50
19. Ms. Chanpheng	27	P.5	Gardener	1/2	5/8	60
20. Ms. Won	28	P.5	Gardener	0/2	8/8	80
21. Ms. Dam	29	P.5	Gardener	2/2	5/8	70
22. Ms. Phai	29	P.5	Gardener	1/2	8/8	90
23. Ms. Mali	30	M.6	Shop seller	2/2	8/8	100
24. Ms. Lae	30	P.5	Gardener	2/2	6/8	80
25. Ms. Maniwon	31	M.6	Housewife	2/2	8/8	100

26. Ms. Phatthana	32	Vocation	Shop owner	2/2	7/8	90
27. Ms. Phonkaeo	34	Teaching	Teacher	2/2	8/8	100
28. Ms. Ton	35	P.4	Gardener	2/2	5/8	70
29. Ms. Pik	35	P.5	Gardener	2/2	8/8	100
30. Ms. Pe	37	P.5	Gardener	1/2	6/8	70
31. Ms. At	37	M.3	Gardener	2/2	8/8	100
32. Ms. Vilaivan	42	M.6	Hunter	2/2	8/8	100
33. Ms. Khamwan	42	P.5	Gardener	1/2	8/8	90
Old Generation (OG)						
34. Ms. Lin	45	P.5	Gardener	2/2	8/8	100
35. Ms. Bunlueam	48	P.5	Gardener	2/2	6/8	80
36. Ms. Chanthi	52	P.5	Rice farmer	2/2	8/8	100
37. Ms. Chanphon	52	P.5	Gardener	0/2	8/8	80
38. Ms. Amphon	55	P.6	Rice farmer	1/2	4/8	50
39. Ms. Wan	62	P.5	Gardener	0/2	8/8	80
40. Ms. Pinkham	67	P.2	Housewife	2/2	8/8	100
41. Ms. La	75	No academic background	Gardener	1/2	8/8	90
42. Ms. Suk	80	No academic background	Do nothing	2/2	8/8	100

Table 16: The performance of judges in rating the LPL and SLV accents.

Raw score of correct identification (out of 10)	score percentage	number of judges (out of 41)	number of judges (percentage)
10	100	14	31.1
9	90	9	22.0
8	80	7	14.7
7	70	6	14.7
6	60	3	7.3
5	50	2	4.9

Phuan in Banteay Meanchey Province, Cambodia: Resettlement under the Reign of King Rama III of Siam

Thananan Trongdee¹

Abstract

During fieldwork in 2012 on Lao-Tai languages in Banteay Meanchey Province on the northwest border of Cambodia, the author met a number of Lao speakers who were called 'Liao' by the Khmer people in that area. This research led to the determination that some of these Liao people were actually speakers of Phuan. This then raised the question of why the Phuan were living in this place, which was very far from their homeland in Laos. The objectives of this paper, therefore, are first to prove that some Liao villagers in Banteay Meanchey are Phuan speakers; and second to propose that their ancestors came to this area during the power expansion of the Siam Kingdom in the Early Rattanakosin period. To prove these hypotheses, linguistic data are analyzed and compared with that of speakers of dialects of the displaced Phuan in the central part of Thailand and with a Phuan dialect in Laos. Historical records of Siam are also examined in order to determine when their ancestors came to this area in present-day Banteay Meanchey Province in Cambodia. The analysis reveals that the language of Phuan speakers in Banteay Meanchey Province is closely related to Phuan dialects in Thailand, and there is evidence from historical records stating that the Siam Kingdom sent a large number of Lao-Tai captives to work as laborers in Battambang during the reign of King Rama III (1824–1851). Thus, the linguistic evidence and historical evidence presented here are mutually supportive.

Keywords: Phuan, Tai Phuan, Liao, Phuan Cambodian, Phuan Resettlement

Introduction

In 2012, the author conducted fieldwork in the villages of Lao and Tai speakers in Banteay Meanchey and Battambang Provinces, situated in northwestern Cambodia, next to Sra Kaew Province of Thailand. The author found that the 'Liao' people (as the Khmer called them) lived in many villages scattered from the Aranyapradesh district of Thailand, across the Poi Pet border post, to Srei Sophone, the capital of Banteay Meanchey Province, which is 40 kilometers from the border. There were also some Liao people living in Battambang Province, more than 100 kilometers from their relatives in Banteay Meanchey. Among these groups of Liao, there were 10 villages where Phuan speakers lived. Some of these people did not even know that they were Tai Phuan but thought they were Liao, the exonym given to them by the Khmer—the majority group in this area. These Tai Phuan speakers in Cambodia did not know exactly when, why or how their ancestors had come to be there. They only knew that their great-grandfathers said that they fled to these places from Siam because they were afraid of being captured by

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the Siamese army and forced to serve as soldiers. As no studies currently exist concerning Lao-Tai speakers in Cambodia, this comparative linguistic and historical study of the Phuan in Banteay Meanchey and Battambang Provinces seeks to trace the movement of the Phuan and their language.

The Migration of Phuan from Their Homeland to Siam

The migration of the Phuan from their homeland in present-day Laos to Siam has been documented by many scholars including Viravong (1985), Smuckarn and Breazeale (1988), Piyabhan (1998) and Vongvichit (2012). In addition, the history of Muang Phuan has been recorded by Senmany et al. (2001). When and why the ancestors of the Phuan had to move from their homeland can be summarized as follows.

The mountainous homeland of the Phuan was established before the fourteenth century and was known as Muang Phuan (the principality of Phuan people), with Xieng Khouang as the capital. Muang Phuan, located on the *Plain of Jars* plateau, has an area of approximately 400 square kilometers and is 1,200 feet above sea level, southeast of Xieng Thong (Luang Phrabang Kingdom) and northeast of the Vientiane Kingdom. By the mid-fourteenth century, King Fa Ngum had unified the Kingdom of Lao Lan Xang, and Muang Phuan became a semi-independent vassal state under the Lao Kingdom. Beginning in the fifteenth century, the Phuan people experienced more hardship when three powers tried to take control of their state—the Annam Kingdom (Vietnamese) in the east, the Lao Kingdom in the west and the Kingdom of Siam in the southwest. The Phuan kings had to pay tribute to these powers for centuries. By the 1770s, the Kingdom of Siam had taken control of all Lao territories which were to serve as vassal states including Muang Phuan. The kingdom had begun taking people from these states to be used as manpower in Siam. In 1782, King Nanthasen of Vientiane (1781–1794) forced some Phuan people to move to Siam, and again in 1792 he forced the Tai Dam (Black Tai) and more than 4,000 Tai Phuan to move to Siam where King Rama I (1782–1809) commanded that they stay in Bangkok. After the Lao King Anouvong (1805–1828) had launched a campaign for the national liberation of Laos, many Phuan were forced to move again between 1834 and 1837; this was before the war started again between Siam and Vietnam in Cambodia (between 1841–1845). In 1875–76, after the Siamese army had suppressed the Chinese Ho marauders' invasions of northern Lao, many Phuan and Lao people were again moved to Siam. By the end of 1876, the Phuan people were allowed to return to Muang Phuan, but there were only a few who went back to their homeland.

The Phuan in Cambodia

Schliesinger (2011:315) indicates that there are ten villages in Mongkol Bourei District, Banteay Meanchey Province where Phuan speakers live, and he reports the names of these villages. Jaturaphatarawong (2013:5) also refers to ten villages in Mongkol Bourei District, Banteay Meanchey Province and additionally includes one village in Battambang Province. In Banteay Meanchey Province the villages are: Pongro Village, Banteay Neang Commune; Ta Sal Village, Chamnaom Commune; Sranal Village, Sambour Commune; Prey Totueng Village, Phnum Touch Commune; Pupi Deum Village,

Ta Lam Commune; Sdey Leu and Sdey Krom Villages, Koy Maeng Commune; Kouk Thnong Village, Ou Prasat Commune; Kantom Ruy Village, Bat Trang Commune and Rohat Tuek Village, Rohat Tuek Commune; and Thamo Kol District in Battambang Province. The Phuan population in these villages is estimated to be around 3,000–4,000. The Phuan people have been peasants in this region for more than 200 years, but currently only children and old people remain, as most young Phuan have gone to work primarily as laborers in Bangkok or in the other parts of Thailand (Jaturaphatarawong 2013:5).

Objectives

This paper has two objectives. The first is to prove that the Liao language spoken in these ten villages is a Phuan language closely related to Phuan in Thailand. The second is to present evidence showing that the ancestors of these Phuan villagers were forced to move to these locations to become laborers in Banteay Meanchey which was, at that time, a part of Battambang Province and thus was part of Siam during the reign of King Rama III.

Linguistic Evidence

A pilot study conducted by Jaturaphatarawong (2013) reports that the Liao speakers in these ten villages in Banteay Meanchey Province all speak the same dialect. For this paper, the phonological system and basic words of Liao speakers in one village (Pong Ro Village) are studied. The phoneme inventory of this language is described in the appendix.

The sound development of initial consonants, tones and vowels is used as the linguistic evidence to prove that the Liao people are actually Phuan speakers.

Development of Initial Consonants and Tones

The classification of Southwestern Tai Dialects was proposed by Chamberlain (1975:50), who divided Southwestern Tai into two main groups, the P group (proto Tai voiced stops changed to voiceless unaspirated stops) and the PH group (proto Tai voiced stops changed to voiceless aspirated stops); he then subdivided them by considering their pattern of split and coalescence of proto tones as shown in Chart 1.

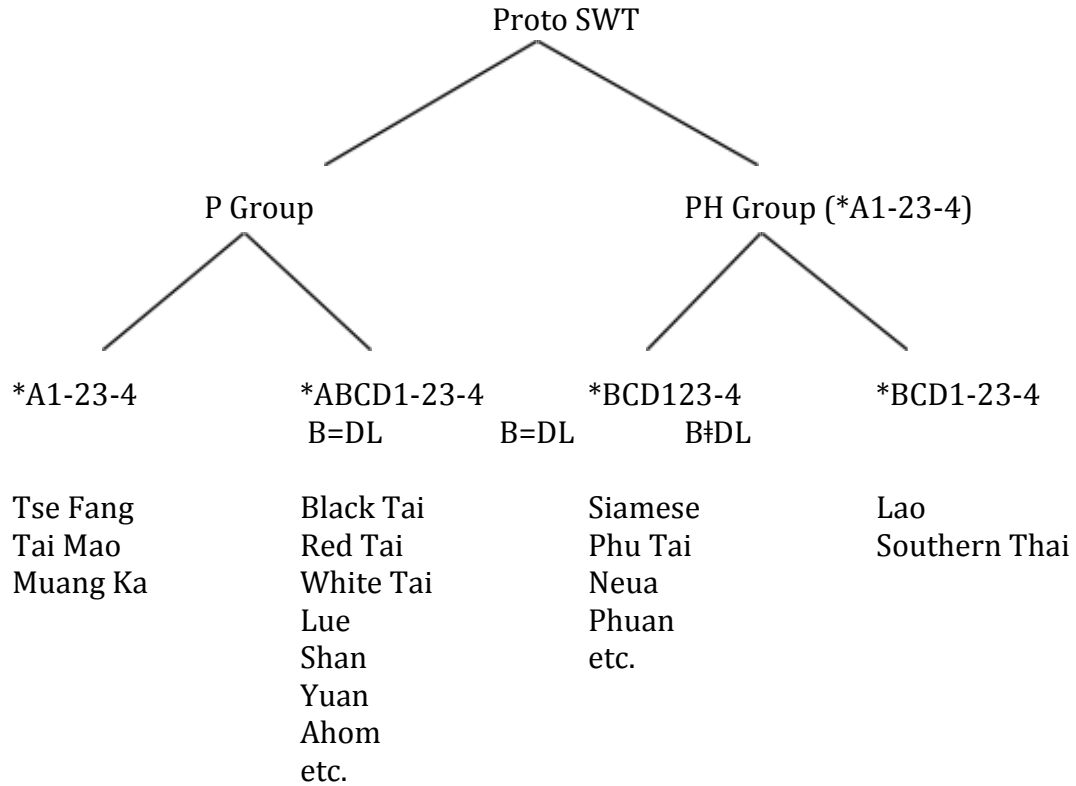


Chart 1: Classification of southwestern Tai dialects by Chamberlain (1975)

The proto Tai initial voiced stops - **b* **d* and **g* as reconstructed by Li (1977) have changed to voiceless aspirated stops in the Pong Ro dialect in words such as:

****b > ph***

phi: ⁴⁴³	'fat'
phu: ⁴⁴³	'mountain'
phɔ: ³³²	'father'
phɛ: ⁴⁴³	'raft'
pha: ⁴⁴³	'to take along'

****d > th***

thuaɲ ⁴⁴³	'to guess'
tha:k ⁴²	'land leech'
thɔ:ŋ ⁴⁵⁷	'stomach'
tha:ŋ ⁴⁴³	'way, road'
thɛ:k ⁴²	'to measure'

****g > kh***

kha: ⁴⁴³	'stuck'
khem ⁴⁴³	'salty'
kha:ŋ ⁴⁴³	'chin'

khi:m⁴⁴³
kha:⁴⁵⁷

‘pincers’
‘to trade’

The Pong Ro dialect in this study therefore should be classified in the PH group because the proto initial consonants **b* **d* and **g* became *ph*, *th*, and *kh*, respectively.

According to Chamberlain’s criteria in Chart 1, the PH group is subdivided into two groups based on the pattern of split and merger of proto tones, i.e. **BCD123-4*, B=DL and **BCD1-23-4*, B≠DL group.

By adapting Gedney’s *Checklist for Determining Tones in Tai Dialects* (1972), 66 basic words from the checklist were elicited, as shown in Figure 1.

*Tone *Initial	A	B	C	DL	DS
1. Voiceless Consonants	ear, leg, head	egg, to split, knee	rice, shirt, to kill, fever, five	broken, torn, the gums, to carry on a shoulder pole	flea cooked, ripe, vegetable
2. Unaspirated Consonants	year, eye, to eat	forest, chicken, old	aunt, rice seedlings, to boil	the lungs, wing, to pound	frog, liver, to hurt
3. Glottalized Consonants	to fly, red, star	shoulder, young man, to scold	crazy, village, to open (the mouth)	sunshine, to bathe, flower	fish hook, raw, chest
4. Voiced Consonants	hand, water buffalo, rice field	older sibling, father, dry field	water, younger siblings, wood horse	knife, (one’s) child, blood, outside	bird, to tie up, to steal

Figure 1: Gedney’s checklist for determining tones in Tai dialects

In this field study, the author elicited more than 800 words from the informants. One informant was a 78-year-old male speaker and the other was a 75-year-old female speaker. Gedney’s checklist for determining tones was used first, and a wordlist from Li (1977) was used to collect data on consonant and vowel sound developments; six tones were found. The shapes of these tones were based on the auditory judgment of the author. The tone system and tone shapes in the Pong Ro dialect are shown in Figure 2.

From the details of its tone system and tone shapes it can be said that in the Pong Ro dialect, the tones in the B column are similar to the tones in the DL column (B123 = DL123, B4 = DL4)

*Tone *Initial	A	B	C	DL	DS
1	T1(24)	T3(32)	T5(44?)	T3(32)	T1(35)
2	T2(443)	T3(32)	T5(44?)	T3(32)	T1(35)
3	T2(443)	T3(32)	T5(44?)	T3(32)	T1(35)
4	T2(443)	T4(332)	T6(45?)	T4(42)	T2(44)

Figure 2: Similarity of tones in the B column and the D column in Pong Ro dialect

Based on the criteria B=DL mentioned above, it can be judged that the Pong Ro dialect should be grouped with Siamese, Phu Tai and Phuan but should not be grouped with Lao. The tone system of the Pong Ro dialect is very different from Lao because the striking features of the tone system in all Lao dialects are B≠DL, C1=DL123 and C234=DL4 as suggested by Brown (1965) and Chamberlain (1975). The tone system of Vientiane² Lao is shown in Figure 3.

*Tone *Initial	A	B	C	DL	DS
1	T1(24)	T3(33)	T4(21?)	T4(21?)	T1(35)
2	T1(24)	T3(33)	T5(342?)	T4(21?)	T1(35)
3	T1(24)	T3(33)	T5(342?)	T4(21?)	T1(35)
4	T2(35)	T3(33)	T5(342?)	T5(342?)	T3(44)

Figure 3: Tone system of Vientiane Lao

The tone system of the Pong Ro dialect is also very different from Siamese. The tone system of Bangkok Siamese is shown in Figure 4.

²The tone system of Vientiane Lao is from the author's field study for this paper.

*Tone *Initial	A	B	C	DL	DS
1	T1(24)	T3(11)	T4(42)	T3(11)	T3(11)
2	T2(33)	T3(11)	T4(42)	T3(11)	T3(11)
3	T2(33)	T3(11)	T4(42)	T3(11)	T3(11)
4	T2(33)	T4(42)	T5(45)	T4(42)	T5(45)

Figure 4: Tone system of Bangkok Siamese

Although in Phu Tai and in Pongro Phuan the tone shapes in column B are similar to the tone shapes in column DL, the pattern of the tone system in Phu Tai is different from that in the Pong Ro dialect. The tone system of Phu Tai³ is shown in Figure 5.

*Tone *Initial	A	B	C	DL	DS
1	T1(24)	T2(32)	T4(44?)	T2(32)	T1(24)
2	T1(24)	T2(32)	T4(44?)	T2(32)	T1(24)
3	T1(24)	T2(32)	T4(44?)	T2(32)	T1(24)
4	T2(32)	T3(45?)	T3(45?)	T2(32)	T3(35)

Figure 5: Tone system of Sakon Nakhorn Phu Tai

³The tone system of Phu Tai was found to be based on Phok Noi village, Phanna Nikom district, Sakon Nakhorn Phu Tai in the author's field study for this paper.

Development of Vowels

The analysis above confirms that the Pong Ro dialect is not a Lao dialect. Comparing the tone system of Pong Ro with Siamese, it can be seen that Pong Ro is also not a sub-dialect of Siamese. The remaining question is whether or not Pong Ro is a dialect of Phu Tai.

Even though the tone shapes in column B are similar to the tone shapes in column DL (B=DL) in Phu Tai, one of the most salient features of Phu Tai is the sound change of proto diphthongs **ie, *iē, *iā, *iō, *ue* and **ui*, which became *e, ə, ə, ə, ə* and *o*, respectively. To demonstrate that the Pong Ro dialect is not a Phu Tai dialect, some cognate words in Phu Tai, the Pong Ro dialect and Siamese are compared below.

Proto Tai diphthong **ie*

<i>Phu Tai</i>	<i>Pong Ro</i>	<i>Siamese</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
le: ³²	lia ⁴⁴³	lia ³³	'to lick'
pe:n ³²	pian ³²	plian ¹¹	'to change'
je:t ³²	jiat ³²	jiat ¹¹	'to stretch'

Proto Tai diphthong **iē*

<i>Phu Tai</i>	<i>Pong Ro</i>	<i>Siamese</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
də:n ²⁴	dian ⁴⁴³	dian ³³	'month'
lə:t ³²	liat ³²	liat ⁴²	'blood'
bə: ³²	bia ³²	bia ¹¹	'to poison fish'

Proto Tai diphthong **iā*

<i>Phu Tai</i>	<i>Pong Ro</i>	<i>Siamese</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
hə:n ³²	hian ⁴⁴³	rian ³³	'house'
khəŋ ³²	khian ³²	khian ¹¹	'young (chicken)'

Proto Tai diphthong **iō*

<i>Phu Tai</i>	<i>Pong Ro</i>	<i>Siamese</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
hə: ³²	hia ⁴⁴³	ria ³³	'boat'
lə:ŋ ²⁴	lian ²⁴	lian ²⁴	'yellow'
kə: ²⁴	kia ⁴⁴³	kia ³³	'salt'

Proto Tai diphthong **ue*

<i>Phu Tai</i>	<i>Pong Ro</i>	<i>Siamese</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
tho: ³²	thua ³²	thua ¹¹	'bean'
ho: ²⁴	hua ²⁴	hua ²⁴	'head'
ho: ³²	hua ³²	rua ⁴²	'to leak'

Proto Tai diphthong *ui

<i>Phu Tai</i>	<i>Pong Ro</i>	<i>Siamese</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
ho:ŋ ³²	huan ⁴⁴³	ruan ³³	‘ear of corn’
so:n ²⁴	suan ²⁴	suan ²⁴	‘garden’

These sound changes confirm that the Pong Ro dialect is not a sub-dialect of Phu Tai. However, there are some changes of proto diphthongs that could be a shared development in Phu Tai and Pong Ro dialects, such as *eĩ > ə; *oĩ > ə and *əĩ > ə.

The change in these proto diphthongs may be one of the salient characteristics of Tai Phuan because it also happened in other Phuan dialects, such as those in Nongsaeng Village, Pakphli District, Nakhorn Nayok Province, Thailand. The Nongsaeng Phuan data were obtained from Sangvanthrup (1991).

Proto Taidiphthong *eĩ

<i>Phu Tai</i>	<i>Pong Ro</i>	<i>Nongsaeng</i>	<i>Siamese</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
cə: ²⁴	cə: ⁴⁴³	cə: ⁴⁴³	caj ³³	‘breath’
khə: ³²	khə: ³²	khə: ⁴²	buam ³³	‘swollen’

Proto Taidiphthong *oĩ

<i>Phu Tai</i>	<i>Pong Ro</i>	<i>Nongshang</i>	<i>Siamese</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
mə: ³²	mə: ³²	mə: ¹¹	maj ¹¹	‘new’
sə: ³²	sə: ³²	sə: ¹¹	saj ¹¹	‘to put in’

Proto Tai diphthong *əĩ

<i>Phu Tai</i>	<i>Pong Ro</i>	<i>Nongshang</i>	<i>Siamese</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
hə: ^{44?}	hə: ^{44?}	hə: ^{44?}	haj ⁴²	‘to give’
bə: ²⁴	bə: ²⁴	bə: ³³⁴	baj ³³	‘leaf’
tə: ²⁴	tə: ²⁴	tə: ³³⁴	taj ³³	‘gizzard’
tə: ^{44?}	tə: ^{44?}	tə: ^{44?}	taj ⁴²	‘under, below’
kə: ^{44?}	khə: ^{44?}	khə: ⁴⁴	klaj ⁴²	‘close to’
sə: ²⁴	sə: ²⁴	sə: ²⁴	saj ²⁴	‘transparent’

There is yet another shared development in Phu Tai and Phuan, which is the change of the final consonant -k in the cognates in column DL, which became a glottal stop -ʔ in Phu Tai and Phuan. For example:

<i>Phu Tai</i>	<i>Pong Ro</i>	<i>Nongshang</i>	<i>Siamese</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
paʔ ⁴⁴	paʔ ⁴⁴	paʔ ⁴⁴	pa:k ¹¹	‘mouth’
maʔ ⁴⁴	maʔ ⁴⁴	maʔ ⁴⁴	ma:k ¹¹	‘fruit’
teʔ ⁴⁴	teʔ ⁴⁴	teʔ ⁴⁴	te:k ¹¹	‘broken’

phəʔ ⁴⁴	phiaʔ ⁴⁴	phiaʔ ⁴⁴	phiak ¹¹	‘taro’
poʔ ⁴⁴	puaʔ ⁴⁴	puaʔ ⁴⁴	pluak ¹¹	‘white ant’
peʔ ⁴⁴	piaʔ ⁴⁴	piaʔ ⁴⁴	piak ¹¹	‘wet’

Up to this point, analysis has shown that the Pong Ro dialect is Phuan, but it is not Lao and it is not Phu Tai. Another group of dialects in the PH, B=DL node is *Neua*, which consists of Tai Sam Neau, Tai Muang Sen, Tai Yeuang and Tai Muang Vat, as mentioned in Chamberlain (1975:54). However, there is a lack of linguistic data on these dialects, so we cannot compare them with Pong Ro Phuan. Nevertheless, what is more important is to know the Phuan dialects in Thailand and Laos to which the Pong Ro dialect is most closely related.

Comparison of Phuan in Thailand, Xieng Khouang and Cambodia

Phuan in Thailand has been the subject of much study. Some scholars, such as Liamprawat and Wattanaprasert (1996) and Tanprasert (2003) have focused on its phonological characteristics, while others, such as Sukpiti (1989), Sangvanthrup (1991) and Srisuwan (1993) have completed a linguistic description. After reviewing these studies, the author finds that the most salient characteristics to use as linguistic evidence to prove the close relationship of Pong Ro Phuan and Phuan in Thailand are their tone systems. However, Pong Ro Phuan is found to be different from Phuan in Xieng Khouang.

The tone system of Phuan in Xieng Khouang, Laos was described by Chamberlain (1971:30). There are six tones, but the split and coalescence of proto tones ABCD and the tone shapes in Xieng Khouang Phuan are different from those of the Pong Ro dialect. The tone system of Xieng Khouang Phuan is shown in Figure 6.

*Tone *Initial	A	B	C	DL	DS
1	T1(24)	T2(22)	T3(42)	T2(22)	T1(24)
2	T1(24)	T2(22)	T3(42)	T2(22)	T1(24)
3	T1(24)	T2(22)	T3(42)	T2(22)	T1(24)
4	T4(33)	T5(243)	T6(45)	T5(243)	T6(45)

Figure 6: Tone system of Xieng Khouang (adapted from Chamberlain, 1971)

The Phuan dialects in Thailand have been described in many articles and theses, but the most relevant to this paper is the description by Tanprasert (2003). Tanprasert classified the Phuan dialects in Thailand into five groups according to the patterns of their

tone systems (the split and coalescence of proto Tai tones). Group VII of Phuan in Tanprasert (2003:104) is very similar to Pong Ro Phuan when their tone systems and tone shapes are compared. In both of these Phuan dialects, there are six tones, and the pattern of split and coalescence is identical; tone in column B = column DL. However, their tone shapes differ somewhat, as shown in Figures 7 and 8.

*Tone *Initial	A	B	C	DL	DS
1	T1(243)	T3(22)	T5(33?)	T3(22)	T1(24)
2	T2(232)	T3(22)	T5(33?)	T3(22)	T1(24)
3	T2(232)	T3(22)	T5(33?)	T3(22)	T1(24)
4	T2(232)	T4(42)	T6(35?)	T4(42)	T6(35)

Figure 7: Tone system of Phuan in Group VII (Adapted from Tanprasert (2003:104))

*Tone *Initial	A	B	C	DL	DS
1	T1(24)	T3(32)	T5(44?)	T3(32)	T1(35)
2	T2(443)	T3(32)	T5(44?)	T3(32)	T1(35)
3	T2(443)	T3(32)	T5(44?)	T3(32)	T1(35)
4	T2(443)	T4(332)	T6(45?)	T4(42)	T2(44)

Figure 8: Tone system of Pong Ro Phuan

The split and coalescence of proto tones in Group VII Phuan and Pong Ro Phuan are identical, and their tone shapes are similar. It can thus be said that they are similar, because the tone shapes of Phuan in other groups are much more dissimilar.

This linguistic evidence provides the basis for a conclusion that Pong Ro Phuan is closely related to Phuan in Group VII. According to Tanprasert (2003:104) the Phuan speakers in Group VII are the people who live in the following three villages: Padeang Village, Nongphayom Subdistrict, Taphanhin District, Phichit Province; Khawdin Village, Thaitung Subdistrict, Thapklaw District, Phichit Province and Khumkhaw Village, Nongsaeng Subdistrict, Pakphlee District, Nakhon Nayok Province. The evidence

confirms that the ancestors of Phuan in Banteay Meanchey Province moved together (Map 1) with the ancestors of the Phuan in Phichit and Nakhon Nayok Province to central Thailand, and then the ancestors of Phuan in Banteay Meanchey moved again to their location in present-day Cambodia.

Evidence from Siam's Historical Records

The multiple Siamese army invasions of the Lan Xang Kingdom and the forced resettlement of the Lao population to Siam will not be presented here. What the author would like to highlight is that there are some parts of the *Prachum Pongsawadan phak thi* 67 (History Series 67) that concern the resettlements of the Phuan in Siam and the Phuan in Cambodia. This History Series 67 was titled, "Records Pertaining to the Khmer and Vietnamese in the Third Reign" and published by the Fine Arts Department of Thailand in 1938. As will be shown, these historical records are relevant to the resettlement of the Phuan in Cambodia.

In 1833, King Rama III ordered Chao Phraya Bodindecha, the Minister of the Interior, to march troops in to protect the Khmer Kingdom, a vassal state of Siam at the time. Bodindecha, with his soldiers, constructed a cantonment at Battambang, a principality in Cambodia. There was an official order from Bodindecha to Phraya Phiromraja (Fine Arts Department 1938: 6–7), saying "...tell Phraya Phiromraja to lead captives toward Muang Aranyapradesh and build cook-houses there. Tell Phraya Prachacheep to manage purchasing 500 cartloads of rice from Muang Prachinburi, Muang Chachoengsao and Muang Nakhon Nayok and store in granaries at Muang Prachinburi."

In 1837, the tension between Siam and Annam intensified, and King Rama III was afraid that the population in Muang Phuan might be taken to Annam. A royal letter was therefore sent to Chao Phraya Thamma (Fine Arts Department 1938: 34–35), saying "...If this year we cannot prevail upon all Phuan population to move to Siam, there may be some left behind, but you have to admonish the governors of Muang Nongkhai, Muang Nonghan and Muang Chayaburi to be cautious and do not let the Phuan captives flee back to their lands. When dry season comes, prevail upon those who still live there; if they do not consent to move, send troops to evacuate all of them. Do not let them be the source of provisions for our enemy. The Phuan families, who have already moved, will be sent to the Muang written on the list..."

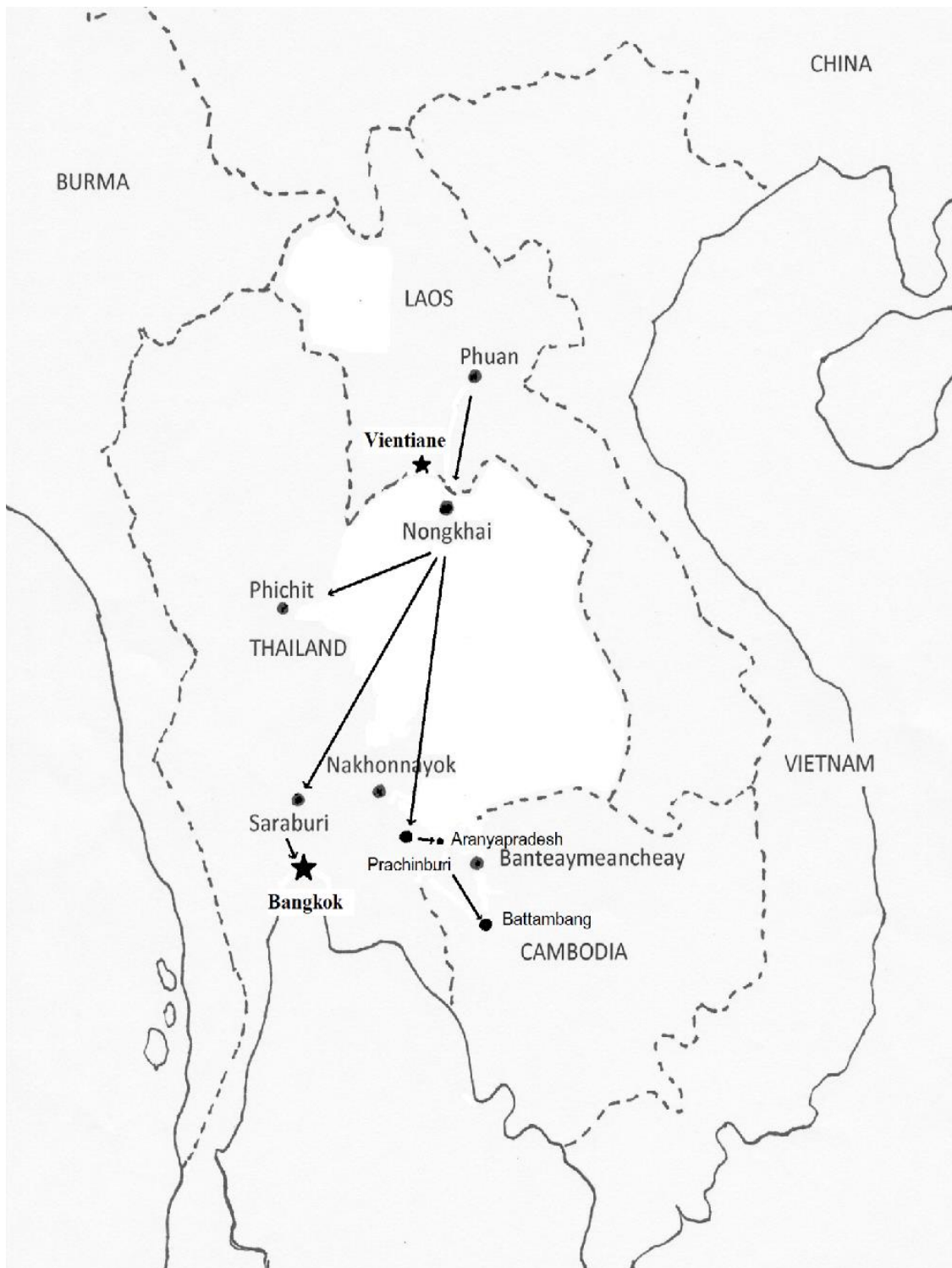
There was also a letter from Chao Phraya Chakri sent to the governors of Nongkhai and Nonghan in 1837 (Fine Arts Department 1938: 137), saying "...Phuan and Lao Vieng proletarians— families, fully-grown men, novice monks and monks altogether 1,770 will be sent to Prachinburi...the departure time from Nongkhai and Nonghan is the 5th month, 10th day..."

History Series 67 (Fine Arts Department 1938: 144–182) provides a record of the number of proletarians and soldiers levied to construct Muang Battambang in 1837, numbering altogether 728 troops, who had to transport rice and salt to Battambang. The levied proletarians were from many Muang in northeast and central Siam. Among the proletarians there were "...Thai 5, Lao 100 from Nakhon Nayok..." They finished the construction of Muang Battambang in 1838.

These historical records provide clear evidence as to why the Phuan speakers can be found in Cambodia, a place that is very far from their former homeland.

Based on this historical evidence, it appears that Phuan people were captured and forced to move to Siam on a number of occasions. It is likely that the route of their resettlement was first from Muang Phuan, from where they were herded across the Mekong River to Muang Nongkhai and Muang Nonghan. Later they were sent to many provinces in northeastern, northern and central Siam. At present, Phuan descendants can be found in many of Thailand's provinces. According to Tanprasert (2003:5) the descendants of the Phuan live in three provinces in the northeast, eight provinces in the north and eight provinces in the central regions of Thailand.

The similarity between the Phuan dialect in Cambodia and the Phuan dialect in Phichit and in Nakon Nayok, provides confirmation that the ancestors of the Phuan in Cambodia might have been forced to leave Muang Phuan together with the ancestors of Phuan in either Phichit or Nakon Nayok. These Phuan captives were then sent to Aranyapradesh to build the cook-houses, and some of them were sent to construct Muang Battambang, which was a part of the Kingdom of Siam at that time. The places they live now are located in Banteay Meanchey, which was a part of Battambang. The proposed route of their resettlement is shown as in Map 1.



Map 1: Route of Phuan resettlement to Cambodia

Conclusions

The linguistic evidence presented in this paper confirms that the Liao speakers in some villages in Banteay Meanchey are actually Phuan speakers, and also that this Phuan dialect has a closer relationship to the Phuan in central Thailand than the Phuan in Xieng Khouang, Laos. This means that the Phuan in these two villages in Cambodia have the same ancestors. The historical evidence presented here has shown that the ancestors of Phuan in Banteay Meanchey moved from central Thailand during the reign of King Rama III (1824–1851).

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Appendix

Phoneme Inventory of Pong Ro Phuan

The author elicited linguistic data from two speakers in Pong Ro village, Banteay Neang Commune, Mongkol Borei District, Banteay Meanchey Province. One informant was a 78-year-old male speaker and the other was a 75-year-old female speaker. The village comprised 284 households. Most of the peasants in this village are Tai (90%); some are Khmer and other ethnic groups.

The phoneme inventory in this Phuan dialect comprises tones, consonants and vowels. Syllable structure is simple: CV:^T, CVV^T, CVC^T, CV:C^T and CVVC^T.

Tones. There are six tones; their phonetic characteristics are as follows.

Tone 1 (T1) represents a low-rising pitch (24).

kha: ²⁴	'leg'
hu: ²⁴	'ear'
ma: ²⁴	'dog'

When this tone occurs in a checked syllable, it becomes a mid-rising pitch.

khat ³⁵	'to shut'
mat ³⁵	'flea'
kat ³⁵	'to bite'
bet ³⁵	'fish hook'

Tone 2 (T2) represents a high-level pitch slightly falling at the end (443).

kha: ⁴⁴³	'thatch grass'
ka: ⁴⁴³	'crow'
ma: ⁴⁴³	'to come'

This tone also occurs in a checked syllable as in the following words.

khat ⁴⁴	'to stop bleeding'
nok ⁴⁴	'bird'
mot ⁴⁴	'ant'

Tone 3 (T3) represents a mid-falling pitch (32).

kha: ³²	'galangal'
khaj ³²	'egg'
kaj ³²	'chicken'
ba: ³²	'shoulder'

This tone also occurs in a checked syllable as in the following words.

kha:t ³²	‘to be torn’
ka:t ³²	‘cabbage’
ʔa:p ³²	‘to bath’

Tone 4 (T4) represents a mid-level pitch and falling at the end (332).

phɔ:332	‘father’
mɛ:332	‘mother’
haj ³³²	‘dry field’

This tone becomes higher when it occurs in a checked syllable as in the following words.

kha:t ⁴²	‘harrow’
ha:k ⁴²	‘root’
liat ⁴²	‘blood’

Tone 5 (T5) represents a high-level pitch with glottal closure (44ʔ).

kha:44ʔ	‘to kill’
pha:44ʔ	‘cloth’
pa:44ʔ	‘aunt’
ʔa: 44ʔ	‘to open the mouth’

Tone 6 (T6) represents a high-rising pitch with glottal closure (45ʔ).

kha:45ʔ	‘to trade’
ma:45ʔ	‘horse’
na:m ^{45ʔ}	‘water’

Consonants. There are 20 consonants in the Pong Ro dialect. All of them can occur in the syllable initial position : *p- ph- b- t- th- d- c- k- kh- ʔ- f- s- h- m- n- ɲ- l- w- j-* and some of them can occur in the syllable final position : *-p -t -k -ʔ -m -n -ɲ -w -j*. Their phonetic characteristics are as follows.

/p/ represents a voiceless unaspirated bilabial stop [p] when it occurs as an initial consonant, and it is inaudibly released [pʰ] when it occurs as a final consonant.

pa:32	‘forest’
pi:443	‘year’
pa:44ʔ	‘aunt’
ʔa:p ³²	‘to bath’

/ph/ represents a voiceless aspirated bilabial stop [pʰ]. It occurs in the syllable initial position only.

pha:32	‘to split’
phɔ:332	‘father’

phi:²⁴ 'ghost'

/b/ represents a voiced unaspirated bilabial stop with pre-glottalization [ʔb]. It occurs in the syllable initial position only.

ba:³² 'shoulder'
 ba:n⁴⁴⁷ 'village'
 ba:w³² 'young man'

/t/ represents a voiceless unaspirated alveolar stop [t] when it occurs as an initial consonant, and it is inaudibly released [t¹] when it occurs as a final consonant.

ta:⁴⁴³ 'eye'
 taŋ³² 'small stool'
 tu:⁴⁴⁷ 'breast'
 kat³⁵ 'to bite'

/th/ represents a voiceless aspirated alveolar stop [t^h]. It occurs in the syllable initial position only.

tha:³² 'dock'
 thaŋ³² 'to strike'

/d/ represents a voiced unaspirated bilabial stop with pre-glottalization [ʔd]. It occurs in the syllable initial position only.

da:³² 'to scold'
 daŋ⁴⁴³ 'nose'
 den⁴⁴³ 'tomato'

/c/ represents a voiceless unaspirated alveolo-palatal affricate [tɕ]. It occurs in the syllable initial position only.

cə:⁴⁴³ 'heart'
 ca:ŋ⁴⁴³ 'insipid'
 cum³² 'to dip in water'

/k/ represents a voiceless unaspirated velar stop [k] when it occurs as an initial consonant. It is inaudibly released [k¹] when it occurs as a final consonant.

kaj⁴⁴³ 'far'
 kaj³² 'chicken'
 ka:ŋ⁴⁴³ 'to spread'
 kok³⁵ 'base'

/kh/ represents a voiceless aspirated velar stop [k^h]. It occurs in the syllable initial position only.

khaj³² 'egg'
 kha:ŋ⁴⁴³ 'chin'

/ʔ/ represents a glottal stop [ʔ] when it occurs as an initial consonant, and it is inaudibly released [ʔ̚] when it occurs as a final consonant.

ʔaj ⁴⁴³	‘to cough’
tuaʔ ³⁵	‘to lie’

/f/ represents a voiceless labio-dental fricative [f]. It occurs in the syllable initial position only.

faj ⁴⁴³	‘fire’
fi: ²⁴	‘boil, ulcer’

/s/ represents a voiceless alveolar fricative [s]. It occurs in the syllable initial position only.

saj ⁴⁴³	‘fish trap’
sa:m ²⁴	‘three’

/h/ represents a voiceless glottal fricative with nasalization [h̥]. It occurs in the syllable initial position only.

haj ⁴⁴³	‘chicken louse’
ha:m ²⁴	‘to carry by two persons’

/m/ represents a voiced bilabial nasal [m]. It can occur both in the syllable initial position and in the syllable final position.

ma: ⁴⁴³	‘to come’
ma:m ⁴⁵⁷	‘spleen’

/n/ represents a voiced alveolar nasal [n]. It can occur both in the syllable initial position and in the syllable final position.

na: ⁴⁴³	‘rice field’
nom ⁴⁴³	‘milk’
naŋ ²⁴	‘skin’
no:n ²⁴	‘worm’

/ɲ/ represents a voiced palatal nasal [ɲ]. It occurs in the syllable initial position only.

ɲa: ³³²	‘grandmother’
ɲa:ɲ ³³²	‘to walk’

/ŋ/ represents a voiced velar nasal [ŋ]. It can occur both in the syllable initial position and in the syllable final position.

ŋa: ³³²	‘twig’
ŋa: ⁴⁴³	‘sesame’
dɛ:ŋ ⁴⁴³	‘red’

/l/ represents a voiced alveolar lateral approximant [l]. It occurs in the syllable initial position only.

lom ⁴⁴³	'wind'
lan ²⁴	'back'

/w/ represents a voiced labio-velar approximant [w]. It can occur both in the syllable initial position and in the syllable final position.

wa: ³³²	'to say'
wi: ⁴⁴³	'to fan'
wa:w ⁴⁵⁷	'to speak'

/j/ represents a voiced palatal approximant [j]. It can occur both in the syllable initial position and in the syllable final position.

ja: ⁴⁴³	'medicine'
ja: ³²	'do not'
fa:j ⁴⁴⁷	'cotton'

Vowels. There are 18 monophthongs : *i i: e e: ε ε: ɨ ɨ: ə ə: u u: o o: ɔ ɔ:* and three diphthongs : *ia ia ua*. Their phonetic characteristics are as follows.

/i/ represents a short close front vowel [i].

khin ²⁴	'ginger'
tin ³²	'earlobe'

/i:/ represents a long close front vowel [i:].

khi:n ⁴⁴³	'body'
phi: ⁴⁴³	'fat'

/e/ represents a short close-mid front vowel [e].

ʔen ⁴⁴³	'tendon'
hen ²⁴	'to see'
ken ³²	'smart'

/e:/ represents a long close-mid front vowel [e:].

ʔe:n ⁴⁴³	'to lie down'
le:n ²⁴	'great grandson'
phe: ⁴⁴³	'collapse'

/ε/ represents a short open-mid front vowel [ε].

keɲ ³²	'to swing'
keɲ ³²	'essence'

/ε:/ represents a long open-mid front vowel [ε:].

ke:ɲ ⁴⁴³	'curry'
khε:ɲ ³³²	'shin'
phε: ⁴⁴³	'raft'

/ɪ/ represents a short close central vowel [ɪ].

mɪn ⁴⁴³	'dizzy'
khɪŋ ²⁴	'to stretch'

/i:/ represents a long close central vowel [i:].

mɪ:n ⁴⁴³	'to open (one's) eyes'
tɪ:m ³²	'to add'

/ə/ represents a short open-mid central vowel [ə].

lək ⁴⁴	'deep'
khəŋ ²⁴	'a kind of fish trap'

/ə:/ represents a long open-mid central vowel [ə:].

kə:p ³²	'shoes'
khə:ŋ ³³²	'half'

/a/ represents a short open central vowel [ɐ].

khaŋ ²⁴	'to pen'
lak ⁴⁴	'to steal'

/a:/ represents a long open central vowel [ɛ:].

kha:ŋ ³²	'a top'
kha:ŋ ³³²	'langur'

/u/ represents a short close back rounded vowel [u].

ɲuŋ ⁴⁴³	'mosquito'
cum ³²	'to dip'

/u:/ represents a long close back rounded vowel [u:].

ɲu:ŋ ⁴⁴³	'peacock' (full word : nok ⁴⁴ ɲu:ŋ ⁴⁴³)
cu:m ⁴⁴³	'budding'

/o/ represents a short close-mid back rounded vowel [o].

com ³²	'to repine'
com ⁴⁴³	'to sink'

/o:/ represents a long close-mid back rounded vowel [o:].

co:m ⁴⁴³	'to carry with two hands'
to:ŋ ³²	'to collect water'

/ɔ/ represents a short open-mid back rounded vowel [ɔ].

khɔj ⁴⁴⁷	'I'
tɔŋ ³²	'bundle'

/ɔ:/ represents a long open-mid back rounded vowel [ɔ:].

khɔ:j ⁴⁵⁷	'slope'
cɔ:m ⁴⁴³	'peak'

/ia/ represents a diphthong [i:a] when it occurs in a smooth syllable and becomes short [ia] in a checked syllable with glottal stop coda [ʔ].

mia ⁴⁴³	‘wife’
piaʔ ⁴⁴	‘wet’

/ia/ represents a diphthong [i:a]. It becomes short [ia] when it occurs in a checked syllable with glottal stop coda [ʔ].

mia ⁴⁴³	‘to go back’
piaʔ ⁴⁴	‘bark’

/ua/ represents a diphthong [u:a]. It becomes short [ua] when it occurs in a checked syllable with glottal stop coda [ʔ].

mua ⁴⁴³	‘gloomy’
puaʔ ⁴⁴	‘white ant’
tuaʔ ³⁵	‘to deceive’